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Italian Fellas in Olive Drab: Exploring the Experiences of Italian-American Servicemen in Sicily and Italy, 1943-1945

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ITALIAN FELLAS IN OLIVE DRAB: EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF
ITALIAN-AMERICAN SERVICEMEN IN SICILY AND ITALY, 1943-1945

by

Guido Rossi

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate School
and the Department of History
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for the Degree of Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

ITALIAN FELLAS IN OLIVE DRAB: EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF ITALIAN-AMERICAN SERVICEMEN IN SICILY AND ITALY, 1943-1945

by Guido Rossi

May 2017

Despite constituting the largest ethnic group in the U.S. Armed Forces during World War II, the experiences of Italian-Americans have received scant attention by historians. In particular, the stories of the U.S. citizens of Italian descent or Italian-born but naturalized Americans who served in Italy, have received almost none. These soldiers, sailors, airmen, and coastguardmen who could often speak Italian, had grown up in Italian-American families and neighborhoods, and still had relatives in Italy, were asked to go fight in their country of origin. During the Allied advance, these men found themselves in close contact with a destitute Italian population that they saw as their own.

Relying on oral histories and the personal papers of Italian-Americans dispatched to the Italian theater, this thesis will analyze their experiences and motivations for service. Their stories reveal controversial experiences and a flux of mixed emotions, distant from the simple image of curious coincidences presented in the sources for the general public. Despite their origins, Italian-Americans did not reveal divided loyalties and went to fight without hesitation in their country of origin, unlike other ethnic groups. Although combat experience in itself proved similar to that of all the other American servicemen, a reemergence of their cultural roots and national bonds during occupation duty and in contact with the local population. This set their overall war experience apart

from those of other ethnic minorities within the U.S. Armed Forces, in a way that stands out in the study of World War II.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMG	Allied Military Governor
AMGOT	Allied Military Government
AWOL	Absent Without Leave
BN	Battalion
CIC	Counter Intelligence Corps
COL	Colonel
CPT	Captain
ETO	European Theater of Operations
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigations
GEN	General
GIR	Glider Infantry Regiment
HQ	Headquarters
ID	Infantry Division
IR	Infantry Regiment
KIA	Killed in Action
LCI	Landing Craft Infantry
LCT	Landing Craft Tank
LCVP	Landing Craft Vehicle Personnel
LT. COL.	Lieutenant-Colonel
MAJ	Major
MTO	Mediterranean Theater of Operations
OCS	Officers Candidate School

OSS	Office of Strategic Services
PO3	Petty Officer Third Class
POW	Prisoner of War
PFC	Private First Class
PIR	Parachute Infantry Regiment
PTO	Pacific Theater of Operations
PVT	Private
ROTC	Reserve Officers' Training Corps
RSI	Repubblica Sociale Italiana
SGT	Sergeant
SIM	Servizio Informazioni Militari
S/SGT	Staff Sergeant
T/4	Technician Fourth Grade
T/5	Technician Fifth Grade
TRUST	Trieste United States Troops
T/SGT	Technical Sergeant
USAAF	United States Army Air Forces
USN	United States Navy
WAC	Women's Army Corps
WIA	Wounded in Action

The Italian-American Soldiers



The sturdy sons of Italy —
That land of song and wine,
Where love and labor make up life,
And art and verse combine,
Now torn with internecine strife —
The noble sons of Italy
Still prove their sterling worth,
In token of the land they love,
That gave their mothers birth.

The loyal sons of Italy,
In their adopted home,
Still venerate their altar fires
As did their old heroic sires
Of Napoli and Rome ;
And in the marching legions
Of Yankee fighting men,
The gallant sons of Italy
Fight for their land again.

WILLIAM HOBART ROYCE

Figure 1. "The Italian-American Soldiers" by William Hobart Royce, circa 1939-1945.

Despite constituting one of the largest ethnic groups in the U.S. Armed Forces during World War II, the experiences of Italian-Americans have received scant attention by historians.¹ In particular, the stories of the U.S. citizens of Italian descent or those Italian-born who served in Italy, have received almost none. These soldiers, sailors, airmen, and coastguardsmen who could often speak Italian, had grown up in Italian-American communities, and still had relatives in Italy, were asked to go fight in their country of origin. During the Allied advance up the peninsula, they found themselves in close contact with a destitute Italian population that they saw as their own. The very territory in which they were fighting indeed appeared familiar to most of them, evidence of a long-lasting connection between them and their land of origin.

Relying on oral histories and the personal papers of Italian-Americans dispatched to the Italian theater, this thesis will analyze their experiences, including initial and sustaining motivations for service. Despite their origins, Italian-Americans did not reveal divided loyalties and went to fight without hesitation in their country of origin, unlike other ethnic groups. Second and third generation Italian-Americans continued their practice of assimilating within American society by playing down their Italian roots during their military service in World War II as they had done before the war. For these reasons, they desired their military service to blend in with that of all other white Americans, rather than exceptionally stand out, as in the case of Japanese-Americans. For these reasons, almost all Italian-American servicemen, despite some initial concerns regarding service in war that were shared by all other Americans, did not refuse to take

¹ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic: Wartime Italian-Americans* (Youngstown, NY: Cambria Press, 2006), xiii.

part into the conflict, and especially in the war in Italy against other Italians. In short, they needed to behave like all other Americans and leave their Italian heritage behind.

Nonetheless, the stories of Italian-American servicemen in the Sicilian and Italian campaigns reveal that in reality, they lived controversial experiences and mixed emotions that went beyond the simple image of curious coincidences of Italian-Americans fighting in the land of their parents. Although their combat experience in itself proved similar to that of all the other American servicemen, their cultural roots and national bonds resurfaced in all the moments in which they were not fighting. Most of the Italian-American servicemen were able to speak the Italian language, acting as interpreters for the U.S. military but also communicating and establishing relationships and mutual understanding with the local Italian population. Despite their attempt to blend in with the rest of the American soldiers, their emotional attachment to the old country reemerged in several ways, through the feeling a connection with Italian citizens there or appreciating the country, its history, and its cities. Many of these servicemen of Italian descent went to visit their families and relatives in Italy, even at a time when Italians were still technically the enemy.

As a result, the war experiences of Italian-Americans had characteristic connotations and their service specifically in Italy helped to set it apart from that of the average white American GI and servicemen of other ethnic minorities within the U.S. Armed Forces. Finally, their military service in great part helped them to resolve their dilemma of feeling divided between their American and Italian communities, reconciling themselves with their own Italian heritage. This happened in particular in Italy and Sicily, where the U.S. military often used to its advantage the Italian background of many of its

servicemen for carrying out the duties of interpreters, civil affair officers, and intelligence agents, therefore ensuring the support of the Italian population and facilitating the advance on the territory and the military occupation. After the war, thanks to their military service Italian-American veterans achieved integration in the American society, having accepted their Italian heritage even if they were not proudly displaying it either.

When tackling the experience of Italian-American military personnel serving in Italy during World War II, any historian would initially be shocked and then discouraged by the paucity of existing studies. The absence of a substantial core of works on the stories of the many Italian-American servicemen and servicewomen who went back to Italy with the U.S. Armed Forces between 1943 and 1945 is even more puzzling considering, for example, the good number of sources that have been produced on the Japanese-American internment and military service.² Not much has also been produced on the experiences of German-Americans in World War II. However, specific circumstances related to the period of their immigration place their experiences apart from those of Italian-Americans. In fact, the most significant phase of German immigration in the United States took place between the 1840s to decline at the end of the nineteenth century, right when the Italian immigration started taking off. By the time that the United States found itself at war with Germany in 1941, German immigrants had in most cases become accepted American citizens, blending in with the population, despite carrying on some of their most cherished traditions.

²Masayo Umezawa Duus , *Unlikely Liberators: The Men of the 100th and 442nd* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006); James M. McCaffrey, *Going for Broke: Japanese American Soldiers in the War against Nazi Germany* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013).

The situation of Italian-Americans was much different from that of German-Americans, given the chronological proximity of the Italian immigration, which peaked from 1880 until the 1920s, to their war experience. The parents of the many Italian-American servicemen and servicewomen who served in World War II were often Italian-born and raised. The servicemembers had most of the times grown up in Italian neighborhoods of cities all over the U.S.A., speaking Italian, and following the same traditions that their relatives were following back in Italy. The connection between Italian-Americans and Italy was still strong and very much alive when the U.S. entered the war in 1941. Accordingly, when Italy, along with Germany, declared war on the United States soon thereafter, the situation in which Italian-Americans found themselves was certainly uneasy, perhaps comparable to that of Japanese-Americans. This thesis will analyze the Italian-American experience in World War II by focusing on the most contradictory and peculiar of the circumstances of American immigrant servicemen in World War II, namely that of the many Italian-American GIs, sailors, airmen, and coastguardsmen who were sent to fight in their land of origin, against the Italian and German armies.

Despite the intriguing nature of the subject, to date, only one book attempts to cover the story of Italian-Americans who served in World War II, and no written work focuses specifically on their service in the Sicilian and Italian campaigns.³ The historian aiming at looking further into the subject will, therefore, need to rely on the numerous sources that exist on the overall Italian-American experience in the first half of the twentieth century and on the Italian war of liberation from Fascism. This thesis will

³ Peter L. Belmonte, *Italian Americans in World War II* (Chicago, IL: Arcadia Publishing, 2001).

contribute in eliminating the absence in the historiography of in-depth studies on the participation in World War II of Italian-Americans, as members of the U.S. Armed Forces, but also as members the larger Italian-American community, from their young years to the conclusion of the war.

In reviewing the scant literature on the subject, as a starting point, *Italian Americans in World War II*, by Peter Belmonte, based on actual interviews with veterans, is a short and rather unorganized collection of testimonies, in which an overarching tone of American patriotism emerges. Most of the book is in fact dedicated to their combat experience, telling stories of bravery by Italian-Americans at war that are no different from those of all other U.S. servicemen. The author's intent is to demonstrate the courage and value of Italian-Americans and fend off any hint of discrimination. These tales of heroism obscure the rest of their war experience, which was not limited to combat.

Italian Americans in World War II does not lend itself well for the task of gathering information on the Italian-American servicemen who fought in Italy. In fact, the book is a collection of the stories of servicemen who fought not only in the Mediterranean Theater of Operation (which also included North Africa and southern France) but also the Pacific and the European theater. Even in the few cases in which the Italian-American veteran subjects of the book fought in Italy, their stories are described, from training to their return home after the war, often without providing adequate context. As a result is impossible to associate them with their service in Italy, and they become a blurred picture of their service in World War II. More worrisome, however, is the perceptible desire of Belmonte to celebrate "Americanness," and nowhere in the book do Italian-Americans appear to ever be affected by their Italian heritage or by the

prospect of serving in their country of origin. In all the cases presented, the loyalty to the American flag overcame any emotion or hesitancy there might have been.

For Italian-American servicemen and servicewomen whose ethnic identity stands at the center of their experience in World War II, *The Humble and the Heroic: Wartime Italian Americans*, by Salvatore LaGumina is most useful in learning about the context in which they grew up. The study is not, in fact, specifically focused on the experiences of Italian-American servicemen, but is an analysis of the Italian-American communities, especially of New York City, in the United States in the 1920s, 1930s, and during the war years. It is, therefore, a highly informative source on the years of formation of those Italian-Americans who would be of age to serve in the 1940s and on the war experience of Italian-Americans on the home front.⁴ As such, it explores the daily life in the Italian neighborhoods and “blocks” within these, the discrimination that Italian-Americans suffered, and the controversial support for the Mussolini dictatorship in the decades before the war. It finally ends by describing the support of these communities for the American war effort, both politically and concretely.

LaGumina’s work is a well written, balanced, and informative source on the overall Italian-American experience during the war years. Additionally, it has the merit of including a substantial amount of information on the choice to support the American war effort by Italian-Americans, their entry in the Armed Forces, and even the communication they maintained with their families and communities in the United States. LaGumina considers that Italian-Americans proved indeed their loyalty to the American

⁴ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic: Wartime Italian-Americans* (Youngstown, NY: Cambria Press, 2006).

flag and provided enormous help to the war effort, as Belmonte did, but providing a more complete picture that includes the hardships and the contradictions in their choice.

In the search for a more complete understanding of the background of the Italian-American servicemen and servicewomen who served in World War II, the reading of *The Boston Italians* by Stephen Puleo, and *The Italian-American Experience* by Anthony V. Riccio is certainly helpful to gather more information on Italian-Americans in two other areas of intense Italian immigration such as Massachusetts and Connecticut.⁵ Big cities constituted the first location where Italians established themselves, settling in Boston's North End and New Haven's Little Italy, as a defensive reaction against the suspicion and discrimination that surrounded them. There, they reconstituted their country of origin, speaking Italian, going to Catholic churches, and following Italian traditions. Partially anticipated by the Italian-American contribution in World War I, World War II marked the final step for integration in America, and the postwar years coincided with the movement of Italian-Americans out of these almost segregated neighborhoods. A similar historical course also happened for "The Hill," the Italian-American community in St. Louis, Missouri, as told in the excellent essay by historian Gary L. Mormino.⁶

Although no other comprehensive studies on the Italian-American participation in the American war effort exist, the interest of historians has resulted in the publishing of

⁵ Stephen Puleo, *The Boston Italians: A Story of Pride, Perseverance, and Paesani, from the Years of the Great Immigration to the Present Day* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2007); Anthony V. Riccio, *The Italian American Experience in New Haven* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006).

⁶ Gary L. Mormino, ed., *The Impact of World War II on Italian-Americans: 1935-Present. Selected Essays from the 35th Annual Conference of the American Italian Historical Association, 24-26 October 2002, Chicago, Illinois* (Chicago, IL: American Italian Historical Association, 2007).

articles on the subject.⁷ Stefano Luconi, for example, specifically analyzed the reaction of Italian-Americans at the wake of Operation Husky, the Invasion of Sicily. It was in this major action that which Americans soldiers, Italian-Americans among them, would find themselves fighting against Italian military personnel. For Luconi, Italian-American servicemen and their families in the United States were troubled at the prospect of fighting against fellow Italians and supported the intervention in Italy only with the final aim of defeating Fascism and after promises by the Roosevelt administration of conducting a reconstruction of the country.

Melissa E. Marinaro, researcher at the Italian American Veterans Museum of Chicago, Illinois, has produced another tentative comprehensive study of the experiences of Italian-American servicemen in the Second World War, briefly describing their stories from training to combat.⁸ In it, Marinaro manages to provide a nuanced picture of their war stories, highlighting the contradiction of them fighting in their country of origin but wearing an American uniform. In fact, if in the United States Italian-Americans were often considered Italians, in Italy they were commonly seen as being more American than Italian.

Finally, Nancy C. Carnevale, focusing again on the home front rather than the frontline, analyzed the impact that the war had on the Italian language spoken by Italian-Americans in the United States.⁹ In an atmosphere of suspicion that enveloped Italians in the first years of hostility, the Italian language became representative of sentiments of

⁷ Stefano Luconi, "Italian Americans and the Invasion of Sicily in World War II," *Italiana Americana* 25, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 5-22; Salvatore J. LaGumina, "In Search of Heroes: Italian Americans in World War II," *Italian Americana* 20, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 87-95.

⁸ Melissa E. Marinaro, "La Generazione Più Grande: Italian American Veterans in WWII," *Western Pennsylvania History* 98, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 38-53.

⁹ Nancy C. Carnevale, "No Italian Spoken for the Duration of the War," *Journal of Ethnic History* 22, no. 3 (Spring 2003): 3-33.

loyalty or disloyalty towards the U.S.A. For this reason, Italian-American communities stopped teaching Italian at school, and local newspapers switched to English, while the language started being perceived by the younger Italian-Americans themselves as a shameful secret to avoid (and so it remained until the 1980s when the interest by Italian-Americans in rediscovering their roots resurged in the 1980s). At the same time, however, the military amply relied on Italian-American soldiers with Italian-speaking skills in planning and executing operations in Italy or with the Italian Resistance.

Documentaries featuring oral interviews of Italian-Americans fighting in World War II outnumber the books on the subject and constitute a good source of information. *Fighting Paisanos*, directed by Marco Curti, is based on the oral interviews of four Italian-American GIs, two of them born in Italy, who fought in Italy and experienced first-hand the thrill and the contradiction of fighting there, even against their own people.¹⁰ Even though Marco Curti was able to identify some of the major points of interest in the stories of the Italian-American veterans in the Italian campaign, the documentary appears, at end, a somewhat romanticized view of what was a truly bloody war. Perhaps because it is based on interviews of a much greater number of Italian-American veterans, *5,000 Miles from Home: the Untold Story of Chicago's Italian Americans and World War II*, constitutes a deeply informative source on the stories of servicemen from the Chicago large Italian community.¹¹ Also, in this case, the soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines whose stories are told did not fight exclusively in Italy, but also in Europe and in the Pacific. However, all of them are told with great precision of

¹⁰*Fighting Paisanos*, directed by Marco Curti, (Briciola TV and Rai Cinema, 2013), accessed January 6, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6tzvvIZoZg>.

¹¹*5,000 Miles from Home: The Untold Story of Chicago's Italian Americans and World War II*, directed by Jim DiStasio, and Mark McCutcheon, DVD (Forward March Media, 2009).

details, and can provide a good comparative basis, while several of the veterans interviewed are actually veterans of the Sicilian or Italian campaign. Unlike the other sources on the subject, *5,000 Miles from Home* extensively dedicates much space to the occupation of Italy, to the question of language and Catholic religion as a point of contact between Italian-American servicemen and the local population.

As LaGumina notes, the absence of much study on the subject of Italian-American participation in World War II, even if is not the result of a willing omission by historians, is the evidence of a disturbing tendency. In fact, it probably relates to the demands for assimilation that the American society made towards immigrant communities in the twentieth century, and the latter's equal desire to become fully accepted American citizens. This resulted in one tale of American unity that, however, flattened the cultural differences of the different ethnic minorities within society, including that of Italian Americans. Only with the recent rediscovery of their cultural heritage, has Italian-American history started to grow. Therefore, those interested in the Italian American participation in World War II will inevitably have to look deeper and be open for the use of a wider variety of sources.

Oral interviews constitute the biggest component of this thesis' selection of primary sources, along with several published memoirs of Italian-American veterans of the Italian campaigns. More than other types of primary sources, such as official papers and military documents, oral interviews are likely to explore the more human and personal sides of the war experiences of the combatants who are the subjects of this analysis. Oral interviews, conducted years after the time of service, allow the veteran to reflect, understand more their own experiences and tell them. In the same way, however,

they could possibly allow the veteran himself to see in a different perspective what he saw another way when the events were taking place. Oral interviews proved more useful for the aim of this research than other types of personal sources, like diaries, because they can be directed by the interviewer toward issues of particular interest. In this case, for example, in the oral interviews used, the interviewers interrogated the Italian-American veterans of the Italian Campaign on matters relating to their own ethnicity, something that themselves might see as so obvious to leave it out of personal memoirs.

Diaries could possibly provide a different angle of perspective into the experiences of veterans, because, written shortly after the daily war experiences, they are more likely to reflect the perceptions of the serviceman when he was actually living them. However, the difficulty of a research on a specific ethnic minority here comes into play. World War II U.S. servicemen's personal sources are rarely arranged according to their ethnicity, with the exceptions of Japanese-Americans and, in the recent years, African-Americans whose stories are eliciting increasing interest. The lack of academic interest in the experiences of Italian-American servicemen, however, has caused disinterest also by archivists to build collections dedicated to them. As a consequence, the absence of archival collections dedicated to the experiences of Italian-American servicemen in World War II specifically has, in turn, has not encouraged the emergence of interest in the topic by historians.

Letters could have been another outstanding source of information about personal experiences of WWII servicemen, had it not been for the practice of censorship, designed to expurgate all letters of any precise reference (or even hints) as to where the serviceman was located. Thus, any comment by Italian-Americans of personal struggles because of

service in their country of origin, or indications of contact with Italians, would have immediately caught the attention of the unit censorship officer. Most serviceman did not even attempt to communicate such personal and specific details, fearing their letters would have been blocked. If any did, very likely such mentions have not survived the blade of the censor.

In addition to this, military practice during World War II of indexing sources regarding personnel only in accordance with either religion or race further prevented the constitution of records in which the Italian-American component was clearly identifiable. If in most cases Italian heritage translated into Catholic faith, this was not exclusive of Italian-Americans, therefore making any collection taking only religion into account enormous in size. Secondly, Italian-Americans were most of the times identified as whites, incorporating them into the massive pool of all other white American servicemen. The search for Italian-American servicemen's sources into general collections (including oral history collections), therefore, to this day needs to be conducted at eyesight, "scanning" for Italian lastnames and then further analyzing the source.

For their nature, oral history collections of WWII veterans, tend to be more concentrated and any research more manageable (especially because they are digitized), than military archives that might include diaries. One such collection is the Veterans History Project of the Library of Congress Folklife Center, established in 2000 with the aim of collecting the memories of veterans nationwide. Since then, many contributors have participated in the project, and therefore the collection is vast, online-accessible, as well as potentially rich of information. However, given that anyone can contribute to the project, many of the interviews found were conducted by non-historians, whose lack of

expertise on how to best conduct oral interviews can be detected. There is, in fact, great variation in the quality, length, and content of the interviews. If some of them are high-definition videos, some are instead very poor quality audio interviews conducted in non-adequate settings, with no planning. This has reflections on their content: often, the questions are superficial and not designed to encourage the veteran to talk. Additionally, because of the general nature of the collection and the little preparedness of the interviewer, rarely do the questions take into account issues relating to the Italian-American heritage of the veterans. Therefore, the Veterans History Project is a collection capable of producing sources rich of information, but that is also time-investing and not always rewarding.

The interest in Italian-American heritage has spurred the initiative by some institutions to constitute collections of oral histories dedicated to Italian-American servicemen. Such is the case of the Italian American World War II Veteran Oral History Project of the Heinz History Center of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. In addition to being Italian-American-focused, this collection features interviews conducted by experts in oral interviews, and these two characteristics positively impact the quality of the interviews. Not only are the interviews available in both videos and transcripts, but in all cases they prove to be lengthy and follow a series of insightful questions in which the veterans are encouraged to speak by themselves, almost taking on themselves the conduct of the interview. Additionally, they feature questions that cover all the lifespan of the veteran and are not limited to a few questions on their origins to then focus on their war experiences. Instead, the interviews in this collection dedicate much space to the veterans' experiences in their youth and pre-war years, focusing much on their cultural

heritage, and to their post-war life and the effects of service. Given the much more limited extensiveness of the collection itself (composed of about forty interviews, of which only some are of Italian-Americans serving in Italy), it is much easier to explore, producing fewer, but more rewarding sources of information.

Other general collections of oral history run by professional historians that proved useful for this research exist. One of them is the Rutgers Oral History Archives of World War II of Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey. Although this collection does not specifically focus on Italian-Americans, it is, however, focused on World War II veterans. Therefore, although Italian-Americans do not constitute the majority of the subject interviewed, some of them can be found, and the questions related to the subjects' experience in World War II show great understanding by the interviewers. In fact, in some of these interviews, both personal and combat experiences of the subjects are recorded. Additionally, although the collection is not mainly dedicated to Italian-Americans, the interviewers take care in addressing the Italian heritage of the veterans interviewed, thereby producing in-depth and extensive interviews, rich with information.

Providing a multi-faceted interpretation of the subject of this research appeared the most daunting task, because of the difficulty in finding collections of sources by Italian civilians, military, or partisans that, in one way or another, entered in touch with Italian-Americans in Italy during World War II. In part, the current Italian anti-military atmosphere, which permeates the academia, in particular, was the first obstacle in the establishment of collections of memoirs of World War II Italian veterans. The stain of Fascism even on the most unwilling Italian private prevented any official funding and organization of such collections. The search for memoirs of civilians and partisans has

instead produced more results, that led to the National Archive for Diaries (Archivio Diaristico Nazionale), located in Pieve Santo Stefano, Arezzo, Italy. Organized with a very functional online database and staffed with extremely helpful personnel, the archive has been able to produce matches despite the narrowness of the research. The well-made transcriptions of the diaries belong to a variety of individuals including simple civilians, Italian soldiers turned prisoners of war and then hired workers, and partisans. Even though most of these diaries did not prove to be lengthy accounts that focused in most part on their experiences of contacts with Italian-American servicemen, some of them turned out to be surprisingly rich of references. Ultimately, the sources belonging to “the other side” confirmed the cultural closeness and connection between Italy and the Italian-Americans sent to serve there in the second global conflict.

Indeed, it was Italian origins and cultural influence that stood at the center of the problem for Italian-Americans sent for service in Sicily and Italy. Third-generation Italian Americans, like Captain Daniel J. Petruzzi, might have felt a weaker sense of connection with Italy (which was still stronger than they expected anyway).¹² Second-generation Italian-Americans, however, were raised by Italian parents almost as Italians themselves, most of the times learning the native language within tight-knitted neighborhoods, adhering to the Catholic faith, and following the same traditions and enjoying the same pastimes of their relatives in Italy. A general analysis of the lives of these Italian-American servicemen who grew up in the 1920s and 1930s Italian-American communities, conducted in the first chapter, will, therefore, be necessary to fully understand the drama that unfolded in their lives during the war. Italian-American young

¹² Daniel J. Petruzzi, *My War Against the Land of My Ancestors* (Irving TX: Fusion Press, 2000).

men and women remained trapped by the strong cultural heritage of their families, the discrimination of U.S. society along with its reflections in national politics, and the deteriorating international situation. All this created the basis for the contradictions they experienced when were finally asked to do their duty, as full Americans, in 1941.

The years that preceded the outbreak of the war in Europe and the few months after the entrance of the U.S. in the war against Italy, Germany, and Japan, represented the peak of the tension for the Italian-American communities, as argued in chapter two. It was right then that Italian-Americans were asked to make a choice and declare themselves loyal Americans, or Italians, and thus enemies. Thus, it was the moment in which the issue of a divided loyalty could have emerged, possibly with disastrous consequences. By receiving draft letters for military service and then being officially asked if they had any issue in fighting Italians, young Italian-Americans were literally asked to openly prove their loyalty. Eventually, no dilemmas of divided loyalty emerged among them, despite the uncomfortable pressure by the American society and the implementation of “protective” measures by the U.S. government, such as the “enemy alien” designation of Italian citizens and attempts at their internment. In fact, Italian-Americans, at the end, joined the war effort on the homefront and on the frontline and did so enthusiastically. It was not, however, an outcome that ought to be taken for granted, but it was a conscious and difficult choice made by the over ten million Italian-Americans in the United States, the soon-to-be servicemen and servicewomen included.

Off the Italian-American servicemen and servicewomen went, first to the Pacific theater, and then also to North Africa, Italy, and northern Europe, in a war of increasing levels of violence. Their combat experiences in the Sicilian and Italian battlefields of

Licata, Salerno, Anzio, Montecassino, and the Gothic Line, recounted in chapter three, did not prove extremely different from those of the average GI fighting there, especially after Italy's Armistice. Different, however, might have been their reasons to fight: not to defeat Italy, but to help it by reclaiming it from the evils of Fascist and Nazi dictatorships. Combat, however, did not constitute the entirety of the war experiences of American soldiers in World War II, even though authors have a tendency to focus only on the certainly emotionally excruciating instances of actual fighting.

Italian-American "dogfaces" and servicemen of other branches, however, experienced a different war from all the other Americans in service in Italy when they were not actually fighting: by relating to the local Italian population in R&R areas, when conducting administrative duties in wrecked Italian towns, when working alongside Italian workers, when on leave to visit their Italian relatives, their hometowns, or touring ancient Italian cities. If for all other Americans there, it was a war conducted in another foreign country, this was a land they felt connected to and that was intrinsically familiar to them, in terms of language, culture, traditions, and way of life. Especially if put alongside the terrible experiences of battle in the Italian Campaign, the non-combat, often personally touching, experiences for Italian-American servicemen stand to them in stark contrast. The contraposition of these events created a particularly contradictory and bittersweet war experience for them. Thus, the stories of Italian-American servicemen in Italy proved markedly unique from those all other American GIs serving alongside them.

CHAPTER II –GROWING UP ITALIAN: ITALIAN-AMERICANS

YOUTH IN THE 1920S AND 1930S

With the United States suddenly at war against Germany, Japan, and Italy in 1941, many hyphenated Americans found themselves in delicate situations because of their roots in these countries. Despite the fact that the issue of a divided loyalty between the United States and their country of origin did not emerge for the overarching majority of Italian-Americans in World War II, the distinctively “Italian” life of second generation citizens provided them with a strong Italian background. In 1920s and 1930s pre-war America, Italian parental and communal influence did shape their identities, making them Italian as much as they were American. Inevitably, their partially Italian identities made them feel their service in Italy in a different way than for all the other American servicemen who did not share their Italian roots. German-Americans, Japanese-Americans, and Italian-Americans all were in complex situations in 1941. Nonetheless, these situations were starkly different from one another, and also white ethnic minorities, far from being passive actors in their own histories, actively made choices as the events unfolded, as noted by historian George Pozzetta despite the silence of the historiography on them.¹³ In no way did they automatically pick an American side and developments in their own immigrant histories in the United States set them in a sense of motion, but at every moment they could have taken a different route.

German-Americans, most of whom were products of an immigration distant in time when the war came in 1941, had by then mostly blended in the American society. As

¹³George E. Pozzetta, “My Children are My Jewels,” Italian-American Generations during World War II,” in *The Home Front War*, eds. Kenneth Paul O’Brien and Lynn Hudson Parsons (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 63-66.

a result, they shared a less strong connection with their country than other ethnicities of more recent immigration in the United States, like Japanese-Americans and Italian-Americans, and consequently, a divided loyalty between the U.S. and Germany was a remote risk. Japanese and Italian immigrants, as well as their second or mostly third generation offspring, were in a different position. Japanese-Americans, relatively few in number and placed in the non-white field by American racism, would travel the most turbulent of the roads, undergoing internment, but reacting with gallant and loyal service on the battlefield and at home. Lastly, in the case of Italian-Americans, while their whiteness made assimilation possible, their recent immigration made it problematic to achieve it, resulting in mutually supporting isolation and discrimination. Until the mid-late 1930s, they could have taken directions different from enthusiastic support for the U.S. in case of war. Important changes in the pivotal years leading into the new decade, analyzed in the following chapter, finally made Italian-Americans decide what direction to take.

“I was an American, and that was it,” declared Domenic Melso, who grew up in an Italian neighborhood in Newark, New Jersey from Italian parents, when asked how he felt toward Italian prisoners of war (POWs).¹⁴ Similarly, other forceful assertions of an exclusively American identity like Melso’s are often encountered in oral interviews of Italian-American veterans of the Italian campaign. An analysis of their personal stories and their youth, however, proves that for most of them this was not the case: by growing up in Italian families within Italian-American communities they had also grown up, not

¹⁴ Domenic Melso, interview by Sandra Stewart Holyoak and Joseph Pante, October 15, 2005, New Brunswick, NJ, audio interview, Rutgers Oral History Archives of World War II, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ.

simply as Americans, but as Italian-Americans, assimilating to a substantial degree the cultural and behavioral characteristics of “being” an Italian.¹⁵ Furthermore, their lives as Italian-Americans, despite important details, were not completely dissimilar from those of their Italian-born parents, and from those of Italians still back in Italy.

Born around the 1920s, second-generation Italian-Americans reached military age precisely when World War II broke out. They, and a small minority of third-generation Italian-Americans bore the burden of military service in their Italian-American communities.¹⁶ These young men were the sons of a great number of Italian immigrants who had arrived in the first two decades of the twentieth century, the peak years of an exodus that had started in the 1880s.¹⁷ This immigrant flux started declining only with the passing of restricting laws for immigration in the 1920s. The characteristics of this immigration (mostly a southern Italian venture), and the reasons that made their parents leave Italy (seeking fortune, but envisioning a return), dictated the structure and the nature of the communities they founded. These communities were in fact profoundly influenced by the cultural characteristics of southern Italy, meant for temporary immigrants, and isolated from the rest of the American society. This, in turn, deeply influenced the lives of young second-generation Italian-Americans. From the start, Italian immigration to the United States and elsewhere was marked by its temporary nature: Italian immigrants left their country, mostly for economic reasons, but were not leaving

¹⁵ For an in-depth analysis of the elements of “being” Italian in the case-study of the Italian-American community of New Haven, CT, see Irvin L. Child, *Italian or American? The Second Generation in Conflict* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1943).

¹⁶ George E. Pozzetta, “My Children are My Jewels,” in *The Home Front War*, eds. Kenneth Paul O’Brien and Lynn Hudson Parsons, 65-66; Richard Gambino, *Blood of My Blood: The Dilemma of Italian-Americans* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1974), 285-292.

¹⁷ Jerre Mangione quotes the number of 2 million immigrants in the 1910s and 2.5 million in the 1920s. See Jerre Mangione, *La Storia: Five Centuries of Italian American Experience* (New York, NY: Harpers & Collins, 1992), 131.

behind their hope to go back one day.¹⁸ Most of them were dreaming of enriching themselves in the new land so that they could return to Italy to enjoy a better life.

For this reason, contacts with the Italian families and friends left behind were never severed. Italian immigrants in the new continent not only continued to entertain a lively correspondence with them, but also “sent parcels of salami, cheese, bundles of clothes, and gallons of olive oil to needy relatives in Italy,” a practice that continued throughout the 1930s and even after the war.¹⁹ Often, Italian immigrants themselves, when they could afford it, went back to Italy for brief periods of time. Domenico Iafolla, father of Mario Iafolla, who would serve in the Mediterranean with the U.S. Navy, went back and forth from the U.S.A. to Italy several times after immigrating in the early 1900s.²⁰ Many Italian immigrants, however, returned to Italy and never came back to the U.S. Historian Jerre Mangione estimates that about half of those who immigrated between 1880 and 1924 left America to return to their native country.²¹ Some had accumulated enough wealth and ended their temporary immigration, while others did so because of familial needs and some must have simply felt nostalgia of their homeland. Their reasons were varied, but were all related to their strong connection with Italy. Those who stayed also had deep connections with their native country, and most persistently maintained their contacts with it. As shown in the following chapter, widespread support among Italian-Americans in the 1920s and 1930s for the Mussolini

¹⁸ Sebastian Fichera, *Italy on the Pacific: San Francisco's Italian Americans* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 183-184.

¹⁹ Anthony V. Riccio, *The Italian American Experience in New Haven*, 68.

²⁰ Mario Iafolla, interview by Nicholas Ciotola, January 24, 2005, Rocks (Kennedy Township), PA, audio interview, Italian American World War II Veteran Oral History Project, Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh, PA.

²¹ Jerre Mangione, *La Storia*, 160.

regime in Italy was motivated, in part, by the idea that it was improving the life of Italians there and restoring Italy to its former power.²²

The earliest period of mass immigration to the United States by Italians between the nineteenth and twentieth century was made up by northern Italians, who settled on the eastern seaboard and on the Pacific coast, founding the Italian-American community of San Francisco.²³ This northern-Italian immigration, however, was soon taken over by a much more substantial southern-Italian immigration, which not only remade the West coast Italian-American communities, but also founded the most of the communities in the North and in the East.²⁴ Even though northern-Italian immigration continued, it could not compare to the flux coming from the south of the country, a part of the country culturally distinct from the north. As a result not simply Italian, but specifically southern Italian cultural influences characterized Italian immigration in the U.S. and the life of most of second generation Italian-Americans.²⁵

Too destitute to acquire land in America, southern Italians, despite their rural origins, flocked to the big urban center of the eastern side, New York City, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New Haven.²⁶ Initially massed in slums, Italians gradually expanded in wider spaces in other parts of the cities, but did not drop the temporary nature of their immigration. Their poverty, the precariousness of their situation in a foreign country, and their ignorance of the English language encouraged them to stick together in the United States. Meanwhile, American anti-Italian discrimination, motivated

²² Richard Gambino, *Blood of My Blood: The Dilemma of Italian-Americans*, 291.

²³ Sebastian Fichera, *Italy on the Pacific*, 2-3.

²⁴ Jerre Mangione, *La Storia*, 147.

²⁵ Jerre Mangione, "Finding the Way in America," in *La Storia*, 85-116.

²⁶ Jerre Mangione, *La Storia*, 131.

by nativist sentiments and the fears generated by their poverty and their association with radical socialist politics and crime, continued hitting Italian immigrants since the earliest period of their immigration.²⁷ The mass unemployment, economic instability, and the Great Depression that marked the 1910s and 1920s further convinced them of the need to stay united in their communities. Through unity and cohesion, in fact, they could support each other in difficult times. The typically southern Italian tradition of *campanilismo*, or unity among members of the same town of which the church bell tower (*campanile*) was the symbol, led fellow villagers to stay together in the same neighborhoods or even single blocks or streets, as in Boston's North End.²⁸ Thus, the Little Italies were born: organized in accordance to the town or region of provenance within, physically isolated from the rest of the city, and culturally separated from the rest of American society. Within the boundaries of these Little Italies "the Italians did their best to live as they had in their native villages."²⁹

Italian immigrants, in a way, constituted an undeniable link between the United States and Italy on the international stage, despite the American anti-Italian discrimination. When the United States entered in World War I with the Allied Powers in 1917, Italian immigrants were also subject to the draft. However, they were given the option to enlist in the Italian army instead, because Italy was part of the allied

²⁷Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 41-42; Ronald T. Takaki, *Double Victory: A Multicultural History of America in World War II* (New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2000), 132-133.

²⁸For a more complete history of Boston's Italian-American community of North End, see Stephen Puleo, *The Boston Italians: A Story of Pride, Perseverance, and Paesani, from the Years of the Great Immigration to the Present Day* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2007).

²⁹ Jerre Mangione, *La Storia*, 137.

coalition.³⁰ Many Italian veterans of the First World War decided to return to Italy after their service and further solidified the ties between the Italian community in the U.S. and Italy.³¹ In light of the temporary character of Italian immigration in the U.S., Italian immigrants interpreted their military service in World War I in the U.S. Armed Forces as a duty in exchange for their residence there. The fact that Italy and the United States were allies in the war, and that a very limited number of American troops saw service in the Italian theater of war posed for them no ambiguities like the ones that would emerge in World War II. Consequentially, World War I did not represent a pivotal moment for Italian assimilation in American society, and the bond between the Italian communities and Italy remained unshaken. After taking their uniforms off, Italian immigrants went back to their closed communities.³²

It was in these type of immigrant communities that second-generation Italian-Americans were born and lived their formative years, under their parents' control at least until they reached adult age. Italian-American children rarely ventured outside of their street or block, and even less left their neighborhood.³³ In first place, their parents and the older Italian immigrants who had formed compact Italian-American communities such as Chicago's "Little Sicily" expected their sons and daughters more than everybody else to remain close to them.³⁴ Additionally, most Italian-American communities could be defined as "self-contained," or almost autonomous in their daily existence: Italian shops

³⁰About 60,000 – 70,000 Italians decided in fact to go back to Italy to enlist in the Italian army instead. Reported in Stephen Puleo, *The Boston Italians*, 113-114.

³¹Peter L. Belmonte, "Italian Americans in World War One and World War Two: An Overview," in Paola A. Sensi Isolani, and Anthony Julian Tamburri, eds., *Italian Americans: A Retrospective on the Twentieth Century* (Chicago Heights, IL: American Italian Historical Association, 2001), 38.

³²Richard Gambino, *Blood of My Blood*, 290.

³³*5,000 Miles from Home*, directed by Jim DiStasio, and Mark McCutcheon.

³⁴Ben Morreale, and Robert Carola, *Italian Americans: The Immigrant Experience* (New York, NY: Barnes & Noble, 2006), 97.

filled those streets, and many Italians worked in them to provide goods for other Italians. Certainly, not all Italian-Americans of working age were employed in the neighborhood, and most of them left it daily to work in construction, railroad companies, mines, or other unskilled jobs.³⁵ Children, however, were staying in the neighborhood, and most of all close to the family.

Not all of the Italian-American servicemen who fought in Italy during World War II were American born: some, like Mario Iafolla, were born Italy. Iafolla, was born in Villetta Barrea, Abruzzo, 1920 and immigrated to the U.S. at age three.³⁶ Despite his foreign birth, Iafolla grew up in McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania, where he spent all his formative years. The early years of most Italian-born American servicemen of World War II were therefore not exceedingly different from that of all the other American-born sons of Italian immigrants. Only a handful of the Italian-Americans who would then serve in World War II with the U.S. Armed Forces, were born and also raised up in Italy, before coming to the United States: such is the case of Eugenio Giannobile and Alberto Soria, northern Italians, who arrived to the United States in 1938 and 1940 respectively.³⁷ First Sgt. George G. R. Fontanesi, instead, despite being born in Rices Landing, Pennsylvania, went back to Italy with his family at two years of age. He remained there until 1938, when he fled Italy, not wanting to fight for Mussolini.³⁸

³⁵ Jerre Mangione, *La Storia*, 157.

³⁶ Mario Iafolla, interview by Nicholas Ciotola.

³⁷ *Fighting Paisanos*, directed by Marco Curti.

³⁸ George G. R. Fontanesi volunteered for the paratroopers, for economic reasons (paratroopers were entitled to an additional \$50 monthly pay for hazardous duty), after being drafted in 1941. With the 2nd Battalion, 503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment and, later, the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion, he took part into the campaigns of Algeria and French Morocco, Tunisia, Naples and Foggia, Anzio, and Rome-Arno. See 509 Parachute Infantry Association, 509 Geronimo, "George G. R. Fontanesi," Accessed January 28, 2017, <http://www.509thgeronimo.org/soldierfontanesigg/soldierfontanesigg.html>.

Family was one of the main characteristics of Italian culture and society that immigrants brought with them and never let go. Within these tight-knit Italian-American communities, family was the basic social nucleus, meaning both the restricted family, and the extended family that encompassed distant relatives like grandparents, aunts, and uncles, acquired relatives, godparents, and even close friends. Italian history itself had instilled a general diffidence in the authorities in southern Italian culture subject to aristocratic governments during most of the modern period. The unification of the country in 1861, mostly a northern enterprise and mostly seen by southerners as such, had reinforced this vision.³⁹ After the unification, for decades in the south of Italy the Italian government continued to be perceived as a “foreign” government, and thus the southern tradition of familial loyalty strengthened even more in the late eighteenth century. Families of mostly southern Italian immigrants brought with them also this ideological element to the new continent.

The family in the Italian-American community exerted on its offspring a strong pressure also for conforming to “*la via vecchia*,” or “the old ways.” This consisted of a system of values traditional of the life in their original (most of the time southern) Italian land. The philosophy behind *la via vecchia* was that its preservation would also ensure the preservation of the family, thereby creating a self-perpetuating circle of conservatism among Italian immigrants. The cornerstone of the system was constituted by the paternalistic structure of the family and the clear, gendered subdivision of roles: the honor of the man depending on his ability to provide and protect his family and his

³⁹ Antonello Lepre, *Storia del Mezzogiorno nel Risorgimento* (Rome, Italy: Editori Uniti, 1969), 263-284.

lineage, and the “seriousness” of the woman in administering the household.⁴⁰ Italian parents, themselves raised according to these precepts, tended to reflect the influence they received during their own childhood in Italy to their sons and daughters in America.⁴¹ Boys were therefore raised to provide for their families one day, while girls were instructed to remain in the household to become “competent in their women’s roles as housekeeper, wife, and mother.”⁴² The head of the family was the father, while the mother had complete authority within the household, under her husband. Disobedience by the children was considered unacceptable. However, any severity by their parents was functional to the maintenance of *la via vecchia* and the survival of the Italian traditional culture.

La via vecchia included many other aspects considered to be untouchable and almost sacred. One of the most symbolic and significant was the language itself, which over time rose up to the status of “proof” of conformity to *la via vecchia* and loyalty to the family and the Italian-American community as a whole. The rest of the American society, however, came to interpret this refusal by Italian immigrants to speak English and cling instead to the Italian language as the eminent evidence of their non-assimilation into the American society and disloyalty to the United States.⁴³ This aspect would become particularly important with the passing of the immigration restricting laws in 1917 and 1924 since they exploited the incapacity of most Italian immigrants to speak English to exclude them from naturalization.

⁴⁰ Richard Gambino, “L’Uomo di Pazienza – The Ideal of Manliness,” and “La Serietà – The Ideal of Womanliness,” in *Blood of My Blood*, 117-146.

⁴¹ Irvin L. Child, *Italian or American?*, 44.

⁴² William M. Tuttle, *Daddy’s Gone to War: The Second World War in the Lives of American Children* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 101.

⁴³ Stephen Puleo, *The Boston Italians*. 84-85.

Because of the great differences in pronunciation between Italian and English, Italian immigrants struggled to speak the language. Given the temporary nature of their immigration and the self-contained character they also lacked the need to learn English.⁴⁴ Finally, American society's hostility towards Italian immigrants in the 1920s and 1930s erased any desire to learn it. Because of the old immigrants' needs, Church services continued to be held in Italian, and many of the Italian-American newspapers were also in Italian.⁴⁵

As a result, at home and in their communities, Italian immigrant families spoke Italian: most of the second generation Italian-American future servicemen went to Italy able to speak the language and communicate with native Italians, and most of them had learned it at home. Such was the case for William D. Grieco, born in 1921 from parents from Basilicata, southern Italy. Grieco, Petty Officer Third Class (PO3) of the Coast Guard who served in the Italian theater, admitted that he learned Italian at home, and even better than English while following the Italian traditions of his parents and his family.⁴⁶

Many Italian-American children even grew up learning only Italian, as happened to Joseph DeMasi, son of Italian immigrants from Benevento, Campania in Southern Italy. DeMasi, who would go to serve as 2nd Lieutenant of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment of the élite 82nd Airborne Division, veteran of the North African, Sicilian and Salerno campaigns, even experienced a true language barrier when he first went to school

⁴⁴Jerre Mangione, *La Storia*, 160-161.

⁴⁵ For the same reasons, Hollywood movies, shot in English, were not a big component of Italian-American life, because not understandable by substantial portions of these communities. See Irvin L. Child, *Italian or American?*, 26.

⁴⁶ William D.Grieco, interview by James M. Zanella, August 24, 2004, Penn Hills, PA, audio interview, Italian American World War II Veteran Oral History Project, Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh, PA.

in the U.S.A.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, several Italian-Americans did not learn Italian, like Harry Colombo, who grew up in the more rural area of Herrin, Illinois. Even though both his parents were of northern Italian origins, only his father was born in Italy, and Colombo grew up listening to his parents converse in English.⁴⁸

In terms of language, an important clarification is necessary. In fact, when speaking of an “Italian” language, most of the Italian-American servicemen who learned it in their families, would not actually learn the national language, but simply one of its many dialects. It is important to emphasize the localized nature of these dialects, originating from specific towns and regions of Italy. Dialects, furthermore, ought not be confused with accents but must be seen almost as languages on their own, sometimes intelligible with each other, but in some cases not at all. While the Neapolitan dialect might be comprehensible to a southern Italian from the neighboring regions of Molise or Basilicata, communication would likely be more difficult with a Sicilian, and probably impossible with a northerner from Veneto. This, of course, provided the speakers would stick to their local dialect, which was the language Italians would normally use in their daily life. A national, “standard” Italian, of course, had existed even before the unification of the country in 1861, but still, in the 1930s, it was not the language ordinary people would speak. Although all somewhat able to communicate in Italian, the daily language remained for them the local dialect: Italian immigrants thus brought their dialects with them in the New World. Second generation Italian-Americans acknowledged the difference: William B. Lanza, B-25 turretgunner with the 446th Bomb

⁴⁷ Joseph V. DeMasi, interview by G. Kurt Piehler and Tara Liston, April 1, 1996, Philipsburg, NJ, audio interview, Rutgers Oral History Archives of World War II, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ.

⁴⁸ Sandra Colombo, interview by the author, Herrin, IL, November 25, 2016.

Squadron, 321st Bomb Group of the 15th Air Force based in Italy, born in 1917 in Revere, Massachusetts from Italian parents from Sicily, learned to speak one of its dialects.⁴⁹ The ability to speak a specific Italian dialect influenced the ability of the Italian-American servicemen to communicate with native Italians once in Italy, depending on where the war led them.

Italian neighborhoods were often overwhelmingly populated by Italians, but rarely they were exclusively inhabited by Italians. Even though Italian immigrants developed intense rivalries with other discriminated ethnic minorities (among which none matched the antagonism existing between them and the Irish), Italian children growing up in them in the 1920s and 1930s did interact with other non-Italian children of other immigrant groups.⁵⁰ Much more rarely, however, did they interact with middle class, white “Americans.” In any case, even though contact with other immigrants happened, “outsiders” were a minority of the entire social world of second-generation Italian-American growing up in the Little Italies. They accounted for a mere ten percent in the case of Frank Monteleone, Office of Strategic Services (OSS) agent in Italy during the war, who had grown up in Brooklyn, New York.⁵¹ Italian children tended, in general, to stick with other Italian children, and their *milieu* was their street, their block, and their neighborhood.

Not all second generation Italian-American children grew up in Italian-American neighborhoods and were isolated from the rest of the American world. Some, in fact,

⁴⁹ John W. Lanza, *Shot Down Over Italy: A True Story of Courage and Survival in Nazi-occupied Italy during World War II* (Caldwell, NJ: Bright Spot Books, 2010), 8, 151.

⁵⁰ Joseph J. Amoroso, interview by James Maloney, April 7, 2006, Cambridge, MA, video interview, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington D.C., accessed January 28, 107, <http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.46620/sr0001001.stream>.

⁵¹ *Fighting Paisanos*, directed by Marco Curti.

moved multiple times with their family during their youth, or simply their families settled in neighborhoods of mixed ethnicities. Nonetheless, the Italian influence from the parents and the Italian community remained remarkably strong even for these Italian-American children. For example, Rocco C. Siciliano, born from Calabrian parents in Salt Lake City, Utah, remember having a circle of Italian immigrant friends.⁵² Emilio A. DiFilippo, born in Canonsburg, Pennsylvania in 1916, grew up in a non-exclusively Italian neighborhood with Irish, Polish, and Russians. Yet, his brother, his sister, and himself at first learned only Italian, learning English only later at school.⁵³ Emilio DiFilippo would go on to experience a remarkably danger-free service with the Air Forces in the Mediterranean during the conflict.

Second-generation Italian-Americans were living in communities that sought to recreate the life, traditions, and pastimes as they were in the old country. Also strictly connected to the familial life was the food culture. On a simple level, Italian-American children ate the typical foods of Italy, like the different types of pasta, or those of the specific regions their parents were from.⁵⁴ Often, local *feste*(celebrations) in the neighborhood consisted of food fairs in which street sellers sold only traditional Italian food, and street food markets resembled in practice those typical of Italy still today.⁵⁵ In a wider perspective, however, food, cooking, and Italian eating habits were part of the

⁵²Rocco Siciliano served as infantry platoon leader in Company B, 87th Infantry Regiment, 10th Mountain Division in Italy. See Rocco C. Siciliano, *Walking on Sand: The Story of an Immigrant Son and the Forgotten Art of Public Service* (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 2004), 7-8.

⁵³ Emilio DiFilippo, interview by Nicholas Ciotola, March 7, 2005, Canonsburg, PA, audio interview, Italian American World War II Veteran Oral History Project, Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh, PA.

⁵⁴*5,000 Miles from Home*, directed by Jim DiStasio, and Mark McCutcheon; *Fighting Paisanos*, directed by Marco Curti.

⁵⁵*5,000 Miles from Home*, directed by Jim DiStasio, and Mark McCutcheon; Richard Gambino, *Blood of My Blood*, 16-18.

symbolic loyalty to Italian culture and to the Italian community. Therefore, not only was “American” food like hamburgers eschewed but also was the practice of eating out for lunch, both for Italian-American adult workers and school-age children. Influenced by American culture, second-generation Italian-Americans started to break the parental rule of consuming the lunch at home: the permission to eat lunch at a friend’s house had to be specifically granted.⁵⁶ Despite this opening, however, no exceptions could be made for the almost sacred ritual of dinner: the Italian family reunited and reaffirmed its unity through this daily ritual.⁵⁷

The greatest difference between the life of Italian immigrants in the United States and Italians still in the old country was the type of life they led. In America, Italian-Americans mainly led an urban lifestyle in stark contrast with one in Italy that was predominantly rural. Although some Italian immigrants had gone to California attracted by the availability of land there and others founded successful agricultural communities in unexpected places like Tontitown, Arkansas, the majority continued to live in urban settings. Their rural roots, however, would inevitably show with the Italian-American habit of setting up vegetable gardens in the backyards of every house, or even the renting of land slots for cultivating and then reselling the produce.⁵⁸ Wine constituted another symbol of Italian culture that Italians brought over from the old country, which they often consumed at Italian-American clubs or associations of various types, perhaps while playing bocce or singing Italian traditional songs.⁵⁹ Despite their urban location, Italian

⁵⁶ Richard Gambino, *Blood of My Blood*, 19-20.

⁵⁷ *Fighting Paisanos*, directed by Marco Curti; Anthony Costanzo, interview by the author and Steve Massa, interview per correspondence, December 2016 – January 2017.

⁵⁸ Ben Morreale, and Robert Carola, *Italian Americans*, 139.

⁵⁹ Irvin L. Child, *Italian or American?*, 25-26.

immigrants habitually persisted in winemaking in their own houses, and even during the Prohibition era.⁶⁰ Italian-American children were normally introduced to it at an early age because wine was considered it a low-alcoholic content drink to be consumed during the meals rather than a substance to cause inebriation.⁶¹ Embedded in the Italian culture transmitted to second generation Italian-Americans, food would sometimes prove an unexpected point of contact with the local Italian population during their service in Italy.

The local *feste* were very often of religious nature: much like in Italy, Italian immigrants and their sons and daughters continued to celebrate their villages' and cities' patron saints, like San Gennaro (Naples' patron saint) or the Madonna of Mount Carmel in New York City. These ceremonies were celebrated in the same fashion they had been celebrated in the old country for centuries.⁶² The vast majority of Italian-Americans professed to be Roman Catholics, as exemplified by the Italian-American community of New Haven, Connecticut.⁶³ Nonetheless, heritage of their southern Italian culture, the religion that Italian families continued to practice in the United States did not coincide with the Roman Catholic faith but included important aspects of folklore, superstition, and belief in magic. Italian-Americans sent to Italy in wartime often found their religiosity to be a link with the country of their parents. In America, however, the anomalous interpretational characteristic of their Catholic faith distanced them from the other major Catholic immigrant minority, the Irish, fueling the rivalry with them.

The legacy of the southern Italian culture in Italian-American communities also emerged in other ways. Although most were Catholics, only a minority were really

⁶⁰ Ben Morreale, and Robert Carola, "Extending the Boundaries," In *Italian Americans*, 118-145.

⁶¹ John W. Lanza, *Shot Down Over Italy*, 14-19.

⁶² Jerre Mangione, *La Storia*, 170.

⁶³ Irvin L. Child, *Italian or American?* 34.

practicing. The explanation can be found in the secular distrust of southern Italians for any authority, including that of the Catholic Church.⁶⁴ Immigrant distrust of government did not make much distinction between the Italian or American authorities. Both of them often appeared as equally foreign in the eyes of the Italian parents. Government encroachment in the life of the immigrant communities was seen as threatening the compactness of their communities and the sacred unity of families.

In most cases, second generation Italian-Americans grew sheltered from the influence of the American society until their adult age. They were certainly never completely isolated from it, and as the years passed the cultural contact between the native American society and the Italian communities would also grow.⁶⁵ School, however, represented the very first and most important source of American influence in the lives of second-generation Italian Americans before the adult age, and one that Italian parents could not stop. Far from encountering widespread acceptance, “Italian kids” there experienced a feeling of inadequacy in the expanse of American society. At the same time there, they received first taste of a society that in the 1920s and 1930s offered only two options: discrimination or assimilation through a full embrace of American values and rejection of any foreign link, in this case, Italian identity.⁶⁶

At the light of this, Italian parents became even more convinced of their distrust of education for the betterment of the lives of their children and the survival of their Italian world, discouraging their sons and daughter from continuing their education. Additionally, the need for Italian boys to contribute to the economic unit of family led

⁶⁴Richard Gambino, *Blood of My Blood*, 209.

⁶⁵Richard Gambino, *Blood of My Blood*, 33.

⁶⁶ Jerre Mangione, *La Storia*, 221-222.

most Italian-American children to drop out of school as soon as they were of working age. Emilio DiFilippo's father, a railroad worker, for example, simply "did not believe in the use in going to school."⁶⁷ Carlo Ginobile was not planning on dropping out of school when he left for a summer job at Campbell's Soups, but there he remained until his military service.⁶⁸ Alberto DeFazio, instead, never graduated from a high school and went to work at sixteen years of age.⁶⁹ Without education, rarely could young second-generation Italian-American men pursue jobs more elevated than those of their fathers, while girls were merely expected to take place in the household alongside their mothers. Thus, Emilio DiFilippo quit school at about fifteen years of age and went to work as a coal miner. When Carlo Ginobile came back after the war, he was still lacking the education and also did not take advantage of the GI Bill: he resumed his work at Campbell's Soup.

Increasingly exposed to American intolerance, often displayed by the American authorities, the reaction of the Italian communities became that of closing into themselves, even more, fueling the vicious cycle of discrimination. The mafia stereotype, for example, arrived to include all Italian immigrants and Italian-Americans, although crime first developed in the Italian communities because of the poor conditions there. The police authorities often decided to let these communities deal with the crime problems themselves, effectively abandoning them and contributing to the rise of Italian-American

⁶⁷ Emilio DiFilippo, interview by Nicholas Ciotola.

⁶⁸ Carlo J. Ginobile, interview by Sandra Stewart Holyoak and Jeneann Robinson, February 2, 2004, audio interview, Cherry Hill, NJ, Rutgers Oral History Archives of World War II, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ.

⁶⁹ Albert DeFazio, Sr., interview by James M. Zanella, October 8, 2004, Penn Hills, PA, audio interview, Italian American World War II Oral History Project, Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh, PA.

criminal organizations.⁷⁰ Italian-Americans, including second generation, suffered from the prejudice of American society that considered them all *mafiosi*, as soon as they entered in contact with it.⁷¹

The defensive reaction by the Italian communities of isolating themselves was effectively a self-defeating tactic that further encouraged suspiciousness by American society. In addition to the crime stereotype, Italians were often seen as social agitators. Although at the beginning of their immigration they had refrained from entering labor conflicts, in the first decades of the twentieth-century Italian immigrants had become the frontrunners of American labor unions and radical politics. The 1922 trial against Ferdinando Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti was merely the most brutal expression of American fear of foreign and in particular Italian, anarchism.⁷² As a result, Italians came to be seen as foreigners refusing to integrate, not abandoning their Catholic faith, nor their Italian language, and yet living within the national borders and bringing criminality and social unrest.⁷³

In 1924 Congress passed the Johnson-Reed Act, an immigration-restricting law that required the passage of English proficiency tests as a requirement for mandatory naturalization for all recent immigrants non-U.S. citizens, in great part Italians. It was not a coincidence that the focus of the naturalization process was the language: by hitting the major symbol of Italian identity and disloyalty towards the United States, the legislators achieved a symbolic victory, as well as effectively stopped Italian

⁷⁰ Jerre Mangione, *La Storia*, 168-169.

⁷¹ Richard Gambino, *Blood of My Blood*, 274.

⁷² Jerre Mangione, *La Storia*, 301.

⁷³ Rocco C. Siciliano, *Walking on Sand*, 35.

immigration.⁷⁴ Although immigration plummeted in the following years, the Italian immigrant population grew considerably, while anti-Italian discrimination continued. At school and at work, Italian-Americans were commonly called “wop,” “dago,” “guinea,” and other insulting epithets related to their national origins. Jokingly, Emilio DiFilippo declared “If I had a nickel for every time I was called a ‘dago’ I’d be a very rich man.”⁷⁵ Over time, the Italian origins and the simple fact of “being Italian” were enough to justify racial discrimination, even without the connection with organized crime or radical politics.

By encouraging their sons to drop out of school and seek employment at a young age, Italian parents were trying to stop the disrupting influences of American society into the Italian community. However, in order to work, now adult Italian-Americans in most cases left the Italian neighborhoods entering into contact with the rest of the society even to a greater extent than in their school years. Even if their closest colleagues and friends in the mine or in the factory were often of Italian-American descent as well, they worked alongside colleagues of different origins and for American patrons and clients. In this situation, they were exposed to an even harsher degree of discrimination, but at the same time, they were also inevitably in contact with the same variety of outside influences potentially disruptive of the Italian identity that their parents were so fearful of.

Second generation Italian-Americans in the 1920s and 1930s endured all this every day, stuck between American society’s discrimination and their families’ pressure to remain identified members of the Italian communities. In their exposure to American society, second generation Italian-Americans had certainly seen widespread prejudice,

⁷⁴ Stephen Puleo, *The Boston Italians*, 88.

⁷⁵ Emilio DiFilippo, interview by Nicholas Ciotola.

but at the same time had also enjoyed the first tastes of the social and economic benefits that could derive from integration. Divided between two nationalities, second generation Italian-Americans came to develop what has been recognized as identity crisis and psychological conflict.⁷⁶ Being simply American, rather than Italian, brought not only better job prospects, but also opened new social and political avenues. These opportunities, on the other hand, could never have been offered by the membership in the Italian community, socially marginalized, limited in size, wealth, and in its connections with the American politics. Slowly, the desire of second generation Italian-Americans to break the vicious circle of discrimination and to gain access to these advantages would take over.

The influence of American society had already crept in the identities of second-generation Italian-Americans, as reflected in the emergence of Italian-American slangs like the “Neapolitan-Brooklyn Italianese” described by Air Forces radio operator Mike Ingrisano.⁷⁷ The more they entered into contact with American society, especially upon reaching their working age, the more Italian-Americans started desiring integration. Thus, to improve their lives, Italian-Americans took the road of assimilation, even if it entailed a clear-cut rejection of their Italian identity.⁷⁸ This trend of rebellion by the second generation against Italian community pressure, defined by psychologist Irvin L. Child as the “rebel” reaction, was induced by the undeniable advantages deriving from assimilation, and for this reason would also become the prevailing tendency in the long

⁷⁶ Irvin L. Child, *Italian or American?*, 63; Richard Gambino, *Blood of My Blood*, 33; Jerre Mangione, *La Storia*, 218-225.

⁷⁷ Peter L. Belmonte, *Italian Americans in World War II*, 70.

⁷⁸ Irvin L. Child, *Italian or American?*, 43.

run.⁷⁹ However, the assimilation process for Italian-Americans would take many years to complete, both due to the remaining cores of a strong Italian identity in the Italian communities and to the diffidence of the American society. World War II and the en-masse participation of Italian-Americans to the Allied cause would prove a crucial moment, but still, in the late 1930s and early 1940s, the process of assimilation was far from complete.

Second generation Italian-Americans often started to integrate by playing down their Italian identity and its most striking characteristics, breaking through the walls of the Italian communities and *la via vecchia*. Many put Italian language aside, speaking only English with American friends from outside the neighborhoods, or started dating non-Italians. A complete rejection of any tie with the Italian community did not happen immediately because Italian-Americans were truly divided between their two identities, and also displayed a desire to not abandon their families. In some cases not only second generation Italian-Americans but also their families decided for assimilation, exhibiting a collective rebel reaction, for example by adopting the English language at home, as in the case of Rocco Siciliano's family.⁸⁰ This, however, was the result of a careful political choice by families who wanted to be "American," like those of Robert P. Argentine and

⁷⁹Irvin L. Child, *Italian or American?*, 40. Even though most second-generation Italian-Americans in the sample analyzed by Child followed the rebel reaction, others were attracted by the pressure for conformity by the Italian community. In fact, although promising of fewer and less consistent advantages than a choice to identify with the American side, Italian communities were more encouraging for assimilation by second-generation Italian-Americans, and its few benefits were guaranteed. In contrast, the option of assimilation within the American society was accompanied by intense discrimination, and the long-term advantages it offered were also less tangible in the short run. See Irvin L. Child, *Italian or American?*, 60.

⁸⁰Rocco C. Siciliano, *Walking on Sand*, 33.

Eugene “Gene” Giannobile.⁸¹ The same happened with the families constituting the Italian neighborhood of Herrin, Illinois: even though Harry Colombo’s parents did not communicate in Italian, most of the other parents could, but the desire for assimilation was so strong that young Italian-Americans grew up speaking English with each other.

Some second-generation Italian-Americans even tried to engage in an “apathetic” reaction, effectively attempting to insert themselves between the Italian and American identities, expressing the desire for integration, but without an outright rejection of their Italian identity.⁸² However, the pressure for conformity by the American society of the 1920s and 1930s was strong that required nothing less than total renunciation to foreign influences.⁸³ Many second generation Italian-Americans therefore carefully articulated their position, trying to exclude any cultural or ideological tie with Italy other than blood, even if the Italian influence on them was real. This perverse ideology contaminated even the relationships between young Italian-Americans themselves, with American-born men feeling “less Italian” than those born in Italy, and therefore entitled to call them “wop,” as happened to Ignazio Bellafigliore.⁸⁴ In light of this, it is not surprising that Italian-American veterans like Domenic Melso, still today, proclaim an exclusively American identity, rejecting the definition of Italian and in some cases even that of Italian-American.

Ever more, second-generation Italian-Americans started working towards assimilation into the American society during the late 1920s and in the 1930s, by denying

⁸¹ Argentine, Robert P., interview by James M. Zanella, October 8, 2004, Pittsburgh, PA. audio interview, Italian American World War II Veteran Oral History Project, Pittsburgh, PA; *5,000 Miles from Home*, directed by Jim DiStasio, and Mark McCutcheon.

⁸² Irvin L. Child, *Italian or American?*, 150-152.

⁸³ Jerre Mangione, *La Storia*, 222.

⁸⁴ Ignazio Bellafigliore, interview by Andrew Amari, October 30, 2005, Ridge, NY, video interview, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington D.C., accessed January 28, 2017, <http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.33979/mv0001001.stream>; Bellafigliore would serve as infantryman in the 36th “Texas” Infantry Division, fighting in Salerno and Anzio.

the Italian half of their Italian-American composite identity. In reality, however, all of them, received a strong Italian cultural influence from their parents, families, and communities that shaped their identities as Italian-Americans, rather than simply Americans.

If the intolerance of American society forced them to hide this, Italy presented no such discrimination when they were sent there between 1943 and 1945. In many ways, their service in Italy even encouraged them to display their Italian origins, their familiarity with the local culture, and their ability to speak Italian, more than they had ever been while in the United States. Many, deeply desirous to assimilate and leave behind their foreign heritage, continued to profess themselves as exclusively American and were, therefore, untouched by their service in Italy. Others, instead, would find welcome the encouragement and dig into their Italian identity. In the testimonies of all these Italian-Americans, however, it is possible to detect, between the lines, an underlining sense of familiarity between them and Italy, its culture, and its people. This sense of commonality inevitably derived from their own experience of growing up as Italian-Americans in the 1920s and 1930s.

CHAPTER III –IRONY OF FATE: THE WAR WITH ITALY AND THE REACTIONS OF ITALIAN-AMERICANS

In the mid-1930s, Italian-Americans were still a minority that was yet not integrated within the American society and that maintained contacts with Italy in a variety of ways. Concretely, they kept in touch with their families and relatives at home, and, culturally, most of them received a strong Italian influence that set them apart from the rest of the American population. Although second-generation Italian-Americans had started assimilating into the broader society, they were still undeniably members of the Italian-American community. Furthermore, as late as 1938, Fascism in Italy continued to receive relevant support from Italian-Americans in the United States

Despite all this, a few years later, the outbreak of World War II in 1941 saw obedient and enthusiastic Italian-American participation on the home front and on the frontline on the side of the United States against the Axis coalition, which included Italy. A series of events, both on the national and international stages, convinced Italian-Americans not only to drop every support for the Fascist regime and actively join the war effort on the American side but also to send their sons to fight in Italy against Italians. Italian-American participation in the war against Italy proved somewhat problematic, but the moral conflict was effectively resolved by particular interpretations of the war aims by the second generation Italian-American draftees and volunteers and their families.

Since Mussolini's takeover in Italy in 1922, many *fuoriusciti* (political refugees) left Italy to escape the violent persecutions of the Fascist dictatorship. Those who came to the United States, however, encountered substantial opposition from Italian-American

supporters of Fascism, often exploding in street fights.⁸⁵ As historian Richard Gambino explained in his work *Blood of My Blood*, Italian-Americans had maintained a strong interest for their homeland, and the support for Mussolini was in great part due to the hope that it could do good for Italy and Italians.⁸⁶ For Army soldier Robert Argentine, Mussolini was “straightening out the economy,” and as a result, Italians thought he “was doing a good job before the war.”⁸⁷

Although some were of convinced political belief, for the most part, Italian-American support for Fascism did not stem from deep ideological and political reasons, but from a superficial sense of nationalism.⁸⁸ This support was also fueled by a sense of revenge of Italian-Americans, hoping that Italy could be restored to its former power and its name placed again alongside that of global superpowers.⁸⁹ In this way, they would have been able to find again pride in their origins, “generate ethnic respectability,” and defeat American discrimination.⁹⁰ However, the support for Fascism from substantial portions of the Italian-American community at the same time further set Italian-Americans apart from the rest of American society, thereby encouraging discrimination.

Unlike many Italian immigrants, second-generation Italian-Americans often did not support Mussolini. The reasons, once again, were not ideological, but often merely practical, and rooted in their fear that supporting Mussolini would not socially elevate

⁸⁵ Fiorello B. Ventresco, “Italian-Americans and the Ethiopian Crisis,” *Italian Americana* 6, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 1980), 5.

⁸⁶ Richard Gambino, *Blood of My Blood*, 290-291.

⁸⁷ Robert P. Argentine, interview by James M. Zanella

⁸⁸ Jerre Mangione, *La Storia*, 321.

⁸⁹ Stefano Luconi, “The Italian-Language Press, Italian American Voters, and Political Intermediation in Pennsylvania in the Interwar Years,” *International Migration Review* 33, no. 4 (Winter 1999), 1038.

⁹⁰ George E. Pozzetta, “My Children are My Jewels,” in *The Home Front War*, eds. Kenneth Paul O’Brien and Lynn Hudson Parsons, 64.

them in the eyes of American society, but further marginalize them. In their attempts at blending in within the larger population, they mostly abandoned their support for Fascism, and, in doing so, produced arguments with their families.⁹¹ Second-generation Italian-Americans, were not completely independent from their immigrant communities and were deeply attached to their families even as they were struggling to integrate in the American society. For this reason, the perception of the war against Italy by the greater Italian-American community continued to have great relevance for its second-generation servicemen and servicewomen.

Nonetheless, some Italian-Americans supported Mussolini for decades, even after the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 (which followed the pacification campaign of Libya, between 1923 and 1932) at which time there were about eighty Italian-American newspapers expressing satisfaction for the venture.⁹² “T.H.S.,” an Italian-American reader of the *Trenton Evening Times*, for example, maintained that “Mussolini is not going to conquer the Ethiopians, but liberate and elevate them from a bondage and a state that is unfit for human beings.”⁹³ Demonstrations of masculine military strength were after all seductive strategies to foster nationalist support in Italy and abroad. The new Italian government effectively worked to instill loyalty to Italy by Italian-Americans by maintaining that, even after becoming American citizens, they were still Italians who owed devotion to their motherland.⁹⁴

⁹¹ William M. Tuttle, *Daddy's Gone to War*, 100-101.

⁹² Fiorello B. Ventresco, “Italian-Americans and the Ethiopian Crisis,” 11.

⁹³ T. H. S., “Italy Defended,” in Letters to the Editor, *Trenton Evening Times* (Trenton, New Jersey), December 3, 1935.

⁹⁴ George E. Pozzetta, ‘My Children are My Jewels’, 65; Fiorello B. Ventresco, “Italian-Americans and the Ethiopian Crisis,” 4-5.

Almost simultaneously, Italian-Americans, among the most impoverished sections of American society, greatly benefitted from Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal and increasingly over the 1930s became supporters of the Democratic Party.⁹⁵ For example, Joseph DeMasi remembers that his parents were staunch working-class Democrats particularly grateful for Roosevelt's Social Security Act and the establishment of retirement pensions.⁹⁶ However, Roosevelt's growing opposition to the rising nationalist and authoritarian governments in Europe, including Fascist Italy, was a source of frustration for some Italian-Americans, and the U.S. disapproval of the attack against Ethiopia was particularly aggravating to them.⁹⁷ Although supporters of Mussolini were far from being the majority of the Italian-Americans, their presence was enough to spur concerns by American society and, as later events would show, especially the Roosevelt administration about the loyalty of all Italian-Americans to the United States in case of emergency.⁹⁸

Support for Mussolini started dwindling when the dictatorial nature of the regime became ever more evident, similar to that of Nazi Germany, with the participation in the Spanish Civil War in 1936 and new acts of aggression like those against Albania in 1939 and, finally, France, in 1940.⁹⁹ As a result, in a few years in the late 1930s, support by Italian-Americans for Fascism, revealing itself as but an aggressive dictatorship, almost completely dropped, despite claims otherwise by Fascist officials in the U.S. Italian consular agent Captain E. G. Bertolini, for example, argued in the *Milwaukee Journal-*

⁹⁵ Stephen Puleo, *The Boston Italians*, 168.

⁹⁶ Joseph V. DeMasi, interview by G. Kurt Piehler and Tara Liston.

⁹⁷ Fiorello B. Ventresco, "Italian-Americans and the Ethiopian Crisis," 17-18;

⁹⁸ Fiorello B. Ventresco, "Italian-Americans and the Ethiopian Crisis," 6.

⁹⁹ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 57-58.

Sentinel that “newspapers had merely reflected the surface in reporting that Italian-Americans were opposed to Mussolini’s declaration of war.”¹⁰⁰ With the final fall of any residual Italian-American support for Fascism, any risk of Italian-American disloyalty towards the United States in war and loyalty for Mussolini’s Italy was defused. In fact, more than a few Italian-Americans servicemen who were born in Italy received draft letters in the late 1930s ordering them to report for duty in the Italian Army, but with little effect.¹⁰¹ Mario Iafolla, for example, simply ignored it when he received it in 1938, and his father promptly tore it apart. Iafolla voluntarily joined the U.S. Armed Forces a year later, in 1939.¹⁰²

Love for Italy, however, never translated into automatic support for Fascism, and Italian-Americans generally remained still deeply and emotionally attached to their country of origin even after any sympathy for the regime in the Italian-American community vanished. The anti-fascist *Corriere del Popolo*, for example, attacked with equal energy Mussolini as well as accusations of Italian cowardice based on the poor performance of Italian troops sent to Spain, in 1937. “Those running away in Spain,” the *Corriere del Popolo* explains “are not the heirs of Garibaldi...but fascist squads taught at school to cowardly attack their opponent.”¹⁰³ Therefore, when Roosevelt described the June 1940 intervention in the war by Italy with the attack against France, as a “stab in the back” that was reminding of the stereotypical pictures of Italians as *Mafiosi* and cowards,

¹⁰⁰ “Italian Hearts in U.S. Really Beat for Duce, He Says,” *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel* (Milwaukee, WI), June 13, 1940.

¹⁰¹ Melissa E. Marinaro, “La Generazione Più Grande,” 43.

¹⁰² Mario Iafolla, interview by Nicholas Ciotola.

¹⁰³ Z., “*Gli Italiani Non Sono Codardi*” *Corriere del Popolo* (San Francisco, CA), April 1, 1937.

Italian-Americans were particularly resentful.¹⁰⁴ This proved to be the first of a series of acts that hurt Italian-American support for the Democratic Party, unquestioned until then. In fact, although the majority of the Italian-American population continued to vote for Roosevelt in the 1940 election, its backing dropped considerably between 1936 and 1940.¹⁰⁵ Additional wartime measures by the Roosevelt administration, as this chapter will show, further eroded Italian-Americans' support and, in their eyes, partially damaged Roosevelt's leadership in the war against Italy.

As World War II was raging in Europe in 1940 and 1941, demonstrations of attachment to the old country and patriotism by Italian-Americans were seen by the rest of the American society as alarming signs of disloyalty to the United States. In reality, the Italian-American community was opposed to the war against Germany and Japan as much as the rest of the prevalently isolationist American population. December 7, 1941, with the attack on Pearl Harbor and the outbreak of war with Japan, though, effectively turned the tables around for interventionist sentiment for the American population. For Italian-Americans December 11, when Italy, with Germany, then declared war on the United States, however, proved to be a more significant date.

The Italian declaration of war against the United States, and not vice-versa, ultimately confirmed in the eyes of Italian-Americans the aggressive nature of the Fascist regime that they had already detected and was the final point in destroying any possible

¹⁰⁴Stephen Puleo, *The Boston Italians*, 199; "The National Whirligig – News Behind the News at the National Capital," *Morning Olympian* (Olympia, WA).

¹⁰⁵ Voting for Roosevelt by Italian-Americans declined from 88 percent to 75 percent in cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants, nationwide (including New York City, Pittsburgh, and Boston), between 1936 and 1940. See Stefano Luconi, "WWII and Italian-American Voters," 60-61, in Paola A. Sensi Isolani, and Anthony Julian Tamburri, eds., *Italian Americans*.

Italian-American support to Mussolini's Italy.¹⁰⁶ *La Voce del Popolo Italiano* of Cleveland, Ohio, encouraged all Italian-Americans to back the United States, while the *Daily Northwestern* defined the Italian declaration of war as a "sorrowful blow to the Italian-Americans who dwell on the edge of New York's Chinatown."¹⁰⁷ The *Advocate* reported that "only a year and a half ago...as many as half of the 2,000,000 Italian-American residents of...the New York area were mad about Mussolini. But by the time that Benito chorused 'me too' to boss Adolf's declaration of war on the United States, his local admirers had dropped off to a handful."¹⁰⁸ On the day of the declaration of war, December 11, 1941, the *Boston Traveler* reported the interviews of several of Boston's Italian-Americans, all of them ready to fight what had become to them "the vassal state of Mussoliniland," despite having "sons in khaki" and friends in Italy.¹⁰⁹

To the eyes of Italian-Americans struggling to fight off discrimination, Mussolini's actions were likely to nullify all the progress made in decades, and was perceived as "the ultimate betrayal for Italian-Americans in Chicago and across the country."¹¹⁰ In the case of Carl Liture, his reaction to the news of the Italian declaration of war on the United States amounted only to disgust.¹¹¹ As a result, loyalty to the Italian government of Mussolini did not constitute a factor that ever prevented Italian-American participation in the war against Italy.

¹⁰⁶Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 131.

¹⁰⁷ "Foreign Groups of City Support U.S.," *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH), December 13, 1941; "New York," *Daily Northwestern* (Evanston, IL), December 17, 1941.

¹⁰⁸ Tom Wolf, "Little Italy' Has Gone to War – for Uncle Sam," *Advocate* (Baton Rouge, LA), June 27, 1942.

¹⁰⁹ "Little Italy' Here Welcomes War – Has No Hesitancy in Fighting Nazi 'Vassal State of Mussoliniland,'" *Boston Traveler* (Boston, MA), December 11, 1941.

¹¹⁰*5,000 Miles from Home* directed by Jim DiStasio, and Mark McCutcheon.

¹¹¹*5,000 Miles from Home* directed by Jim DiStasio, and Mark McCutcheon.

Nonetheless, for an American population still suspicious of the love of Italian-Americans for their old country, their opposition to the Fascist regime was not enough to prove their loyalty to the United States. Certain specific situations encouraged this suspiciousness, including the extremely low number of Italian-Americans in the U.S. Armed Forces before 1941. Those who already were in the American military had joined in the pre-war years mainly for economic reasons, and not out of patriotism or sense of duty. Domenic Melso, for example, found out that his education as cabinetmaker did not pay off, and after hearing from some friends about the National Guard, he joined at seventeen years of age.¹¹² Mario Iafolla, instead, joined the Navy in 1939, figuring that, after four months of active service and a promotion, he could send home 25 dollars per month, rather than the 21 he was able to gather with his civilian employment.¹¹³ For his part, Isadore Valenti, instead, “hated the mines” he was working in, and enlisted in the Army in 1934.¹¹⁴ For Emilio DiFilippo the reasons for joining the National Guard in the late thirties were even simpler. During his summer vacation from his job at a retail store, his father always forced him to do housework. By signing up, he could avoid this and “my vacation would be taken care of...and have fun with the National Guard.”¹¹⁵

Most second-generation Italian-Americans like Edward LaPorta were scarcely aware of the declining international situation in the early 1940s, and some did not even know where (or what) Pearl Harbor was.¹¹⁶ In the words of airman Carlo Ginobile:

¹¹² Domenic Melso, interview by Sandra Stewart Holyoak and Joseph Pante.

¹¹³ Mario Iafolla, interview by Nicholas Ciotola.

¹¹⁴ Isadore Valenti, interview by James M. Zanella, May 25, 2004, Penn Hills, PA., audio interview, Italian American World War II Veterans Oral History Project, Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh, PA.

¹¹⁵ Emilio DiFilippo, interview by Nicholas Ciotola.

¹¹⁶ Edward LaPorta, interview by Tommy Lofton, October 15, 2008, New Orleans, LA., video interview, Oral Histories Collection, National WWII Museum, New Orleans, LA, accessed January 28,

“Well, to tell you the truth...the war in Europe was of no concern to me. I mean, I was just a kid having fun. I never even thought of the war. The realization of the war came only after I was drafted.”¹¹⁷ Despite their efforts to become Americans, though, second-generation Italian-Americans still had to prove their loyalty to their adopted country through military service.

World War II renewed the suspiciousness by American society towards Italian-Americans. Nonetheless, the increased atmosphere of suspect in the United States did not weaken Italian ethnic identity and did not lead them to reject their Italianness as many second generation Italian-Americans had done, instead, over the 1930s.¹¹⁸ Nonetheless, Italian-Americans in this tense period slowly came to realize that closing in into their communities and rejecting American culture was, a self-defeating tactic. Instead, the Italian-American press soon mobilized, along with Italian-American organizations and personalities, to proclaim the great sense of loyalty to the United States of Italian-Americans, but without giving up an Italian identity.¹¹⁹ Italian-language ethnic newspapers offered interviews of young men and women presenting themselves as “100-percent American” or “having American ideas.”¹²⁰ Even in the months preceding Pearl Harbor, the Italian-American press was already emphasizing the role and importance of Italian-Americans in the forming U.S. Armed Forces and in the American wars of the

2017, <http://www.ww2online.org/view/edward-laporta/segment-1>; *5,000 Miles from Home*, directed by Jim DiStasio and Mark McCutcheon.

¹¹⁷ Carlo J. Ginobile, interview by Sandra Stewart Holyoak and Jeneann Robinson.

¹¹⁸ Stefano Luconi, “Forging an Ethnic Identity: The Case of Italian Americans,” *Revue française d’études américaines* 96, *Écriture contemporaines de la différence* (May 2003), 97.

¹¹⁹ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 120-123, 131; “Italian Group Aids Defense: Loyalty Pledged at Meeting Here,” *Boston Herald* (Boston, MA), June 9, 1941.

¹²⁰ Stephen Puleo, *The Boston Italians*, 200; A. D’Andreas, “Explains Predicament of Loyal Italians in America,” in Letters to the Editor, *Evening Star* (Washington D.C.), October 13, 1942.

past, especially the First World War¹²¹ The Italian-American veterans of World War I themselves were at the forefront of the campaign.¹²² Despite the fact that several non-Italian-American politicians or prominent personalities of American society also joined the anti-defamation campaign, the Roosevelt's administration, however, was less convinced than the rest of the American public.

Deep-rooted suspicion of Italian-American disloyalty in the government led to signing of Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942. This measure, following the automatic designation of all Italian-born residents in the United States as "enemy aliens," authorized the Secretary of War to designate areas of military importance from which any or all individuals could be excluded.¹²³ Such legislation, applicable also to naturalized U.S. citizens, primarily impacted the population of Japanese descent mostly residing on the American West Coast. Most of them were forcefully taken in custody and transferred into military camps, after the prompt recommendation for such measures by Lt. General John L. DeWitt, head of the Western Defense Command. DeWitt, however, advocated similar measures also for German-Americans as well as Italian-Americans.

Washington did not authorize the extensive application of restrictive and internment measures of Italian-Americans as it did with Japanese-Americans on the account of the practical as well as political consequences stemming from their possible implementation. Taken into consideration, in fact, were not only the impact that the internment of these individuals might have on the national morale but also the logistical

¹²¹ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 25.

¹²² Peter L. Belmonte, "Italian Americans in World War One and World War Two: An Overview," in *Italian Americans*, eds. Paola A. Sensi Isolani and Anthony Julian Tamburri, 38; Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 120; "Italian Veterans of U.S. Pledge Loyalty," *Columbus Dispatch* (Columbus, OH), December 12, 1941.

¹²³ Rose D. Scherini, "Executive Order 9066 and Italian-Americans: The San Francisco Story," *California History* 70, no. 4 (Winter 1991-1992), 367.

difficulties of removing the Italian-American ethnic group numbering millions in the United States. Italian-born naturalized and still Italian citizens, numbered in fact to over 600,000.¹²⁴ It is also possible that Japanese-Americans suffered greater consequences not only due to the smaller size of their community, that made practical application of these measures possible, but also more necessary due to their non-whiteness and the prejudice that stemmed from this.¹²⁵

Although removal of substantial portions of the Italian-American community never happened, Italian-Americans with the status of enemy aliens were subject to bans on ownership of cameras, short-wave radios, and guns. They were as well subject to curfew from 8:00 P.M. to 6:00 A.M. and travel restrictions of a fifty miles radius. The designation of specific areas as militarily important forced an unspecified number of Italian-Americans, probably thousands of them, to move to different areas, and often to different cities, as well as having to regularly report to local FBI offices thereafter.¹²⁶

Most of these measures were applied on the West Coast, and only on a much smaller extent on the East Coast, an area where the Italian-American population was much more numerous. Because of the restrictions imposed upon them, many Italian-Americans designated “enemy aliens” lost their employment. This was, of course, in addition to the shame of the enemy alien designation, defined as a “stigma” by the *Corriere del Popolo*, and degrading for some Italian-Americans to the point of leading

¹²⁴ Rose D. Scherini, “Executive Order 9066 and Italian-Americans,” 369.

¹²⁵ Ronald T. Takaki, *Double Victory*, 134.

¹²⁶ Rose D. Scherini, “Executive Order 9066 and Italian-Americans,” 369.

them to commit suicide.¹²⁷ The issue was particularly burning for those Italian citizens and Italian-Americans like Luigi Antonini who had been firm anti-fascist for a long time and were nonetheless put in the same category as fascist supporters.¹²⁸ Additionally, Italian-American individuals deemed as “dangerous,” based on lists that FBI had been compiling since 1936, were singled out for hearings by a military commission in accordance with the Individual Exclusion Program. On the night of Pearl Harbor, 3,000 of them nationwide were arrested (without being notified the accusations), and after hearings about 260 were then interned in a specially prepared facility at Fort Missoula, Montana.¹²⁹ Among them, Fred Stella, an Italian-American World War I veteran, who was tortured by this condition to the point of losing his mental health and being sent to a mental institute.¹³⁰

Several scholars, including Jerre Mangione and Ronald Takaki, have tended to minimize the relevance of the war-related measures towards Italian-Americans taken by the U.S. government. These historians point out that only a relatively limited number of Italian-Americans were interned, unlike the between 110,000 and 120,000 Japanese-Americans, who were also interned for a much longer period of time.¹³¹ However, they fail to notice that the internment of Italian-Americans itself, even if affected “only” 260 individuals, could have (and arguably had) an important impact on the larger Italian-American population. The possibility that the internment of a few hundred community members could be followed by more extensive measures, similar to those that affected

¹²⁷ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 103. Luigi Antonini, “All Aliens Are Not Enemies’ – A Letter from Luigi Antonini To the Editor of ‘Nazioni Unite,’” *Corriere del Popolo*, April 2, 1942.

¹²⁸ Luigi Antonini, “All Aliens Are Not Enemies’ *Corriere del Popolo*, April 2, 1942.

¹²⁹ Rose D. Scherini, “Executive Order 9066 and Italian-Americans,” 368.

¹³⁰ Gary L. Mormino, ed., *The Impact of World War II on Italian-Americans*, 114-115.

¹³¹ Jerre Mangione, *La Storia*, 341; Ronald T. Takaki, *Double Victory*, 134.

German-American internees during World War I, was a possibility that the greater Italian-American community had no reason to discount.¹³² Italian-Americans in the U.S.A. were also aware of the internment of Japanese-Americans, while unable to rule out the possibility that, secretly, similar measures were affecting other Italian-American communities in a different part of the country.

Most of all, however, these historians seem to disregard the designation of over 600,000 residents of Italian descent as enemy aliens, with all the traumatic repercussions to their personal lives mentioned above.¹³³ Despite this, the U.S. government required Italian-Americans to obediently join in the industrial war effort, and they remarkably did so. More in detail, the enemy alien designation of first-generation Italian-Americans, emotionally impacted the life of their sons drafted for service.¹³⁴ An estimate sets at about 75,000 the number of Italian-American parents of servicemen who received such designation and were subject to all the relative restrictions.¹³⁵ Almost incredibly, some Italian-born servicemen themselves were designated enemy aliens, before being drafted and sent to war under the flag of the United States. “Gene” Giannobile, for example, after being drafted in October 1942, was also designated as enemy alien, resulting in the impossibility of him finding a job as well as the contradiction of having to carry with him

¹³² The situation of Italian-Americans was particularly harsh in Australia, where about 3,500 were interned, followed by 2,000 in the United Kingdom and 600 in Canada just in 1941. See Istituto Storico della Resistenza in Toscana, “War and Ethnicity: Soldiers of Italian Origins in the Allied Armies,” Google Arts & Culture, accessed September 3, 2016, <https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/beta/u/0/exhibit/pgJimskv1fTeLA>.

¹³³ Luigi Antonini, “700,000 Italian Immigrants Are Not Citizens,” *Corriere del Popolo*, May 28, 1942.

¹³⁴ Ronald T. Takaki, *Double Victory*, 133-134.

¹³⁵ Istituto Storico della Resistenza in Toscana, “War and Ethnicity.”

a draft card and an identification card at the same time. “Al” Soria received the same status, before joining the 10th Mountain Division.¹³⁶

Certainly, the enactment of these measures had a negative impact on support for Roosevelt by Italian-Americans, as well as further escalated ethnic tensions by helping to “spread distrust in people of Italian descent who were characterized as potential fifth columnist in the eyes of the US society at large.”¹³⁷ The Roosevelt administration also quickly realized the negative effects on Italian-American support for the Democratic Party. As Italian-Americans were nonetheless displaying an impeccable wartime loyalty to the U.S.A., protests against the enemy-alien designation measures by non-Italian prominent politicians finally persuaded Roosevelt to mitigate his policy.¹³⁸ After October 1942, most of the Italian-Americans interned were liberated and all Italian-born enemy aliens over fifty years of age automatically naturalized without the need of literacy tests, while all remaining individuals defined as such were not subject to curfew and travel limitations.¹³⁹ The announcement of this change of policy by the Roosevelt administration was made on the carefully selected date of October 12, or Columbus Day, a particularly meaningful date for Italian-Americans, precisely because Roosevelt was planning ahead for the 1942 midterm elections.¹⁴⁰

Despite the change of course by the Roosevelt administration, the impact of the measures proved too hurtful for Italian-Americans to completely forget them, and their support for the Democratic Party further declined in the congressional elections of

¹³⁶ *Fighting Paisanos*, directed by Marco Curti.

¹³⁷ Stefano Luconi, “WWII and Italian-American Voters,” in *Italian-Americans*, 66.

¹³⁸ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 142-143.

¹³⁹ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 142-143.

¹⁴⁰ Rose D. Scherini, “Executive Order 9066 and Italian-Americans,” 371.

1942.¹⁴¹ Certainly, undying love for Roosevelt would not be the reason why Italian-Americans would fight in the war. In the minds of Italian-Americans, Roosevelt's war leadership had been shaken once again, and, as the next chapter will show, generated some hesitancy when rumors that American soldiers – including Italian-Americans – would be sent to fight against Italians in Sicily in 1943.

With the outbreak of the war with Italy in 1941, tension for the situation of Italian-Americans reached its peak. Effective service in the war, in production plants and on the frontline against the enemy, would be the ultimate test of loyalty for Italian-Americans. Despite the contradiction of being asked to fight against their own country, the long story of discrimination by American society and the suspiciousness by the U.S. government, Italian-Americans made their choice of standing with the United States.¹⁴² Italian-American women and men of non-military age soon confirmed the pledges of loyalty to the United States made by their media and personalities by joining with enthusiasm the home-front mobilization. For example, historian Salvatore LaGumina, a second-generation Italian-American children in the war years, witnessed the production effort of shops small and large in the Italian-American community and the volunteerism for war-related duties such as air raid wardens.¹⁴³ Italian-born parents and older Italian immigrants directly linked with Italy were those most emotionally connected with their homeland, but despite the temporary ideal of their immigration, they had progressively

¹⁴¹ Stefano Luconi, "WWII and Italian-American Voters," *Italian Americans*, 66-61.

¹⁴² "Italian-Americans Pledge Loyalty," *Jersey Journal*, (Jersey City, New Jersey), December 18, 1941; "Italian-Americans," in *What Other Papers Say*, *Dallas Morning News* (Dallas, TX), January 8, 1942.

¹⁴³ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 96-109.

abandoned their plans to go back once they realized that their sons and daughters wanted to stay.¹⁴⁴

Italian-American men of military age, distinct from their families on the home-front, would face the most difficult test of Italian-American loyalty to the United States, with the prospect of being sent to war. Inevitably, war for second generation Italian-Americans represented a “cruel peak in this generation’s extreme culture conflict.”¹⁴⁵ Second generation Italian-Americans more than anyone else in their communities experienced the contradiction of choosing between two identities: “products of an ethnocentric environment that effectively meant a marginal status – American yes, but with a distinct Italian backgrounds, it became a ‘two-ness’ dilemma for many who were faced with the challenge of straddling two cultures.”¹⁴⁶ Historian William Tuttle confirms that “The ‘two-ness’ dilemma loomed large in the lives of many young Italian-American men in December 1941, when Italy declared war on the United States”¹⁴⁷

Exploring the reasons why second generation Italian-Americans decided to stand with the United States, especially against Italy, is therefore not easy, especially because, as the next paragraphs will show, they themselves articulated their positions in a variety of ways. No automatic choice of siding with the United States, perhaps as a result of evidence of American exceptionalism (or social acceptance, as the previous chapter has shown), emerged, despite the insinuations otherwise and the oversimplifications by

¹⁴⁴ Jerre Mangione, *La Storia*, 237.

¹⁴⁵ Richard Gambino, *Blood of My Blood*, 287.

¹⁴⁶ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 86.

¹⁴⁷ William M. Tuttle, *Daddy’s Gone to War*, 102.

historians like Ben Morreale and Jerre Mangione¹⁴⁸ At most, one general reason to which all of them could probably relate was articulated by the American writer Michael DeCapite in his 1944 book *No Bright Banner*. In it, the motivation to fight off Paul Barone, a second generation Italian-American soldier, was that he hated “the lie that is fascism more than the half truths of our lives” in the United States.¹⁴⁹

One reason that partially motivated second generation Italian-Americans to fight for the United States can be found in the fact that, despite Italian-Americans’ attachment to their land of origin, the reality was that, by 1941, their families had been living, working, and obtaining their sustenance in the U.S. – not in Italy. Therefore, for second-generation Italian-Americans, fighting for the United States meant protecting their families.¹⁵⁰ Such pragmatic considerations, however, rarely appeared in the testimonies of Italian-Americans, and were probably an unconscious realization for most of them.

Few, if any, of the Italian-American subjects of this research, expressed reservations about fighting against the Japanese in the Pacific or the Germans in Africa and Europe. Some actually found their motivation fight, or to voluntarily join, in very idealistic notes, with the need to counter the expansionism of the German and Japanese regimes. Edward LaPorta, in a 2008 interview, stated that “we would have lost our freedom too, if we had not gone to fight the Germans and in the Pacific Theater, to fight

¹⁴⁸ The issue of the loyalty by Italian-Americans during World War II is dismissed as such by Morreale (without support), despite the realization of the crucial nature of the conflict for the integration of Italian-Americans in the United States: “The choice was surprisingly easy for the Italians in America, who looked at their children and realized that the future lay with the young, not with the old, and with a democracy that fulfilled its promises, not with elitism that ignored them and a fascism that lied.” See Ben Morreale, and Robert Carola, *Italian Americans*, 163.

¹⁴⁹ Michael Di Capite, *No Bright Banner* (New York, NY: John Day Co., 1944), 289.

¹⁵⁰ Richard Gambino, *Blood of My Blood*, 292.

the Japanese.”¹⁵¹ Joseph DeMasi expressed similar concerns, while Albert DeFazio went on to say:

...if somebody didn't step in and do something, the people that are really mean like, if they would have won the war, you know what would have happened in this country man, they would have eliminated all the scholars, the teachers... if Japan and Germany woulda won the war. They would've gotten rid of the intellectuals, the school teachers, the demonstrators; they'd have gotten rid of everybody. Because they would want you under their rule. There wouldn't have been no freedom over here. They would have taken over man and they would have slaughtered a lot of people like Germany did with the Jewish peoples, was a very disgrace that they did. And they would have done it here. They would have eliminated millions of people.¹⁵²

The prospect of war with Italy, rather than with Germany or Japan, however, was the most problematic point for Italian-Americans, eliciting more carefully articulated positions by them. In almost no instance did Italian-Americans express an outright dislike for Italians, and the subject of the war with Italy remained purposely avoided until the prospect of actual operations against the Italian Armed Forces materialized in the summer of 1943.

American war propaganda itself adopted a peculiar approach with the third member of the Axis triple alliance, Italy, as examined by historian Jonathan J. Cavallero.¹⁵³ The U.S. Department of Justice, still worried about the emergence of issues of divided loyalty by Italian-Americans, asked important personalities from this community, notably the Italian-born Frank Capra, to profess their loyalty. In the series of movies *Why We Fight* directed by Capra between 1943 and 1945, he heavily made use of all the stereotypes of *Mafiosi*, gangsters, lazy, overweight, hairy, and greasy attributed by

¹⁵¹ Edward LaPorta, interview by Tommy Lofton.

¹⁵² Joseph V. DeMasi, interview by G. Kurt Piehler and Tara Liston; Albert DeFazio, Sr., interview by James M. Zanella.

¹⁵³ Jonathan James Cavallero. “Redefining Italianità: The Difference Between Mussolini, Italy, Germany, and Japan in Frank Capra's ‘Why We Fight.’” *Italian Americana* 22, no. 1 (Winter 2004), 5-16.

Hollywood to Italian-Americans, but conferring them exclusively to Mussolini, and not the Italian people. Italians, never referred to as “dagos” or “wops,” were, instead, depicted as victims of *Il Duce*, thus creating a complete disconnection between the Italian people and their dictatorial government. The humanization of Italians was at complete odds with Japanese and Germans, described instead as megalomaniacs and one with their totalitarian regimes bent for global expansion and destruction of the U.S.¹⁵⁴ The war as told by Capra in *Why We Fight* was not a war against Germany, Japan, and Italy, but rather a war against Germany, Japan, and Mussolini.¹⁵⁵ The anti-fascist *Corriere del Popolo* viewed the war as “between the American nation and the fascist government,” and not the Italian people.¹⁵⁶ The perspective was that of defeating the Japanese and the Germans but helping Italians first off by kicking out *Il Duce*.

The perspective articulated by Capra (one of a war against the Mussolini’s regime, rather than against Italians) was reflective of that of the American people. The *Repository*, of Canton, Ohio, argued that “few Americans have been able to work up any great hatred of the mass of the Italian people in the old country in this war...They have hated Mussolini...with considerable vigor, and they have hated all he stood for, but not his people.”¹⁵⁷ In particular, this was also the position of the Roosevelt administration, aware of the sensibility of the issue for the politically influential Italian-American community. In fact, this same take on the war with Italy was displayed by several Italian-Americans, and that was summarized by sociologist Joseph S. Roucek in their hope for

¹⁵⁴ In-depth analysis of the virulent anti-Japanese U.S. propaganda can be found in John Dower, *War Without Mercy – Race and Power in the Pacific War* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986).

¹⁵⁵ Jonathan James Cavallero. “Redefining Italianità,” 13.

¹⁵⁶ “Italians and the War,” in Mazzini News, *Corriere del Popolo*, January 8, 1942.

¹⁵⁷ Damon Runyon, “Our Italian Friends: Americans will Hold No spite Against Well-Liked Countrymen Of Disgraced Benito Mussolini,” *Repository* (Canton, OH), July 31, 1943.

“American victory, without Italian defeat.”¹⁵⁸ Military-age Italian-Americans understood that their military service was equivalent to proof of loyalty of all Italian-Americans to the United States and, even when the prospect of fighting against Italy made many of them “pause for a second,” they energetically answered the call of the colors.¹⁵⁹

1st Lt. Daniel J. Petruzzi, a third-generation Italian-American from Hazelton, Pennsylvania, but of southern Italian origins, was directed into the Secret Intelligence of the OSS after commissioning from Officer Candidate School (OCS). Despite his hate for Mussolini, he expressed great frustration at the prospect of fighting Italians or having to kill them, even though they had done nothing to prevent the rise to power of *Il Duce*. At the end, however, he finally “understood and shared the pain, the shame, and the sorrow of all ‘Italians’ in the United States who were now at war with the land of their ancestors.”¹⁶⁰ Many young Italian-Americans, like Carlo Ginobile, felt that it was simply their duty, as Americans.¹⁶¹ For some Italian-American anxious to play down their Italian background and exclusively display an American identity, such behavior was particularly important because fully coherent with their struggle to display an American identity. “Gene” Giannobile’s self-denial reached the peak by claiming that military service in the war for the United States was due to his choice of the U.S. as his land of adoption.¹⁶² Cpl. Michele Sasso, born in Termini, Sicily, but raised in Chicago, felt he “had to stick with the United States. It was my home.”¹⁶³ Cpl. Costanzo “wanted to fight both the Germans

¹⁵⁸ Stefano Luconi, “Forging an Ethnic Identity,” 97.

¹⁵⁹ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 86.

¹⁶⁰ Daniel J. Petruzzi, *My War Against the Land of My Ancestors*, 53.

¹⁶¹ Carlo J. Ginobile, interview by Sandra Stewart Holyoak and Jeneann Robinson.

¹⁶² *Fighting Paisanos*, directed by Marco Curti.

¹⁶³ Linda Grisolia, “He Did it For Love,” War Stories, *Fra Noi* (Chicago, IL), July 2010.

and the Japanese...win the war for the USA and also to help Italy eliminate fascism,” but fighting Italians did not figure in his motivations.¹⁶⁴

Most of the time, however, the answer of Italian-Americans to the question of why they served in the war was that they were drafted. Historians like Peter Belmonte have taken great care in emphasizing the instances of enthusiasm in the World War II effort by Italian-Americans focusing in particular on those second and third generation Italian-Americans who voluntarily joined the U.S. Armed Forces.¹⁶⁵ Enlistment records that do not distinguish Italian-American ethnicity prevent an exact assessment of the ratio of volunteer enlistment versus those being drafted by the Selective Service System. The stories of Italian-American servicemen analyzed in the present research, however, tend to show a prevalence of Italian-Americans being drafted for service, while only a minority were effectively volunteers, like Edward LaPorta.¹⁶⁶

A few, like Isadore Valenti, in the Organized Reserve of the Army after his 1934 – 1937 service, were merely recalled to active duty with the war mobilization.¹⁶⁷ Those already in the National Guard like Domenic Melso were similarly mobilized for service in 1940 and 1941.¹⁶⁸ Some others, including Joseph DeMasi, in the ROTC program, obtained their commissions at the start of the war and found themselves automatically in active service.¹⁶⁹ Additionally, some volunteered because aware they would have been drafted anyway – a common practice that was followed, among others, by Fred

¹⁶⁴ Anthony Costanzo, interview by the author and Steve Massa.

¹⁶⁵ Peter L. Belmonte, *Italian Americans in World War II* (Chicago, IL: Arcadia Publishing, 2001), 11-14.

¹⁶⁶ Edward LaPorta, interview by Tommy Lofton.

¹⁶⁷ Isadore Valenti, interview by James M. Zanella.

¹⁶⁸ Domenic Melso, interview by Sandra Stewart Holyoak and Joseph Pante.

¹⁶⁹ Joseph V. DeMasi, interview by G. Kurt Piehler and Tara Liston.

Montelone.¹⁷⁰ In opposite fashion, others who wanted to join simply waited to be drafted, as in the case of Robert Argentine or Bruno Ghiringhelli, or would have been “disappointed” had not they been drafted, like Frank C. Palilla, who served from 1944 onwards in Italy.¹⁷¹

The picture, therefore, is different from that of a mass rush to the enlistment offices described by some authors as well as by the newspapers and Italian-American organizations of the period, both anxious to depict Italian-Americans in favorable light.¹⁷² The reality is probably that the ratio of voluntarily enlistment versus selection for service among Italian-Americans approximated that of the rest of the American male population of military age, with prevalence of draftees over volunteers.¹⁷³ More realistically, Italian-Americans enlisted in numbers proportionally higher than their population in comparison with the rest of American population.¹⁷⁴ Far from contradicting the heroism of Italian-Americans in World War II, this data, rather, confirms it, if one considers that they did their duty, like all other Americans, despite the tragedy of the war against their country of origin and decades of American anti-Italian discrimination.

¹⁷⁰*Fighting Paisanos*, directed by Marco Curti.

¹⁷¹ Robert P. Argentine, interview by James M. Zanella; Bruno Ghiringhelli, interview by Dominic Rios, audio interview, Rutherford, CA., January 4, 2013; Ghiringhelli served as rifleman in F Company, 87th Infantry Regiment, 10th Mountain Division in Italy in 1945, fighting on Mt. Belvedere, Castel d’Aiano, and the Po River Crossing and the Spring offensive of 1945; Frank C. Palilla, interview by John Coates, Natick, MA., February 5, 2005, video interview, Natick Veterans Oral History Project, Natick, MA.

¹⁷²“Italian-American Service – To the Editor of The Republican,” *Springfield Republican* (Springfield, MA), March 26, 1943; It is possible, however, that the volunteer enlistment of Italian-Americans over that of the rest of the American population or that of other ethnic minorities in the Regular Army was greater in specific military districts where Italian population was prevalent. This seems to be attested by Maj. Benjamin Anuskewicz, administrator of New York’s Selective Service Boards in the *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*. See Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 152-153.

¹⁷³Department of Defense, United States of America, “WWII Informational Fact Sheet,” (Washington D.C.: Department of Defense, 1995), 3.

¹⁷⁴ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 128.

There is no consensus on the exact number of Italian-Americans who served in the U.S. Armed Forces between 1941 and 1945. In a speech delivered in 1961 to the Italian American War Veterans of America, Nelson Rockefeller quoted the number of 1.5 million as the total of Italian-Americans who served in World War II, thereby constituting about ten percent of the entire wartime U.S. Armed Forces.¹⁷⁵ Since then, the National Italian American Foundation, followed by several historians, has taken this approximation as accurate.¹⁷⁶ Other sources follow closely, with numbers between 1.2 and the 1.4 million.¹⁷⁷ One difficulty in assessing the exact number also stems from the tendency of Italian-American newspapers of the time in inflating the numbers. More recent estimates suggest lower numbers of 750,000 (considering the presence of an average of fivehundred soldiers of Italian descent in every Infantry Division of the U.S. Army) and are supported by the consideration that about fifteen percent of the overall Italian-American population made by the *Progresso Italo-Americano*.¹⁷⁸ No matter how many Italian-Americans precisely served in the U.S. Armed Forces during World War II it is evident that they truly constituted a substantial number.

These Italian-Americans saw their military service, volunteer or not, in a variety of ways, but rarely as a tragedy. Many directly linked it to their way to gain final and complete acceptance within American society, and simply donning the uniform was

¹⁷⁵ Melissa E. Marinaro, "La Generazione Più Grande: Italian American Veterans in WWII," 43.

¹⁷⁶ Anthony V. Riccio, *The Italian American Experience in New Haven*, 303.

¹⁷⁷ 1.200.000 according to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while 1.400.000 according to other Italian-American newspapers as of August 1943. See Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Repubblica Italiana, "Gli Italiani negli Stati Uniti d'America," accessed September 4, 2016, http://www.esteri.it/mae/doc_osservatorio/gli_italiani_negli_usa.pdf; J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 152.

¹⁷⁸ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 153.

“tantamount to gaining acceptance as a patriotic American.”¹⁷⁹ Others, like author Mario Puzo, saw it as a liberation and as a way to escape the psychological conflict of wanting to integrate while being pulled in the other direction by the Italian family.¹⁸⁰ By being drafted Italian-American sons had no choice but to pledge complete loyalty to the United States and Americanize, exiting the Italian-American community and the Italian family without fault. Not only did the war did not weaken Italian identity, but also in some cases it resurrected national pride. War service was the living proof of Italian-American goodness, bravery, and loyalty. This, in particular, could be displayed through the proud maintenance of Italian names, “even if your superior officers have difficulty in pronouncing it,” at a time when many second generation Italian-Americans were changing it to facilitate their integration.¹⁸¹ Even fighting in World War II against Germany and Japan, leaving Mussolini out of the matter, indirectly meant for many of them contributing to the defeat of Fascism in Italy¹⁸²

Italian-Americans showed their spirit of sacrifice and their loyalty to the United States also by the number of sons (and daughters) that were serving in war in each family. It was an acknowledged fact that Italian families were traditionally particularly numerous, and often several members of the same families served simultaneously, as in the case of the Lanza family or the Adorno family, from Brooklyn, New York.¹⁸³ In the case of the Lanzas, four among the five sons, out of the eight children of the family, went

¹⁷⁹ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 71.

¹⁸⁰ George E. Pozzetta, “My Children are My Jewels” in *The Home Front War*, eds. Kenneth Paul O’Brien and Lynn Hudson Parsons, 70; Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 294.

¹⁸¹ George E. Pozzetta, “My Children are My Jewels,” in *The Home Front War*, eds. Kenneth Paul O’Brien and Lynn Hudson Parsons, 71-72.

¹⁸² *Fighting Paisanos* directed by Marco Curti.

¹⁸³ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 83.

to serve in war (the fifth son was too young).¹⁸⁴The *Progresso Italo-Americano* of New York related the story of Antonio Lorenzo, an Italian immigrant from Basilicata, southern Italy, in the early 1900s, who by 1944 had seven of his sons in service. He was extremely proud of them because “they fight for the liberty of the people of the world and against barbarian governments in the army of the Star-Spangled-Banner,” while his four other sons were also impatient to join.¹⁸⁵Proportionally, the emotional impact on the Italian-American families was particularly hard, and in the case of “Bill” Lanza’s mother, it contributed to the stress that led to her death.

Finding Italian-American women who served in Italy with the auxiliary services of the U.S. Armed Forces is arguably harder than it is locating and following the stories of Italian-American servicemen who fought in the Italian campaign.¹⁸⁶ The main reason is that the government found it particularly difficult encouraging the enlistment of women of ethnic minorities, and it was perhaps a heritage of the Italian-American culture which discouraged women from leaving the household. The U.S. government, in fact, specifically conducted campaigns aimed at the different ethnic minorities, issuing leaflets describing the service in the Women’s Army Corps (WAC) that included the Italian-American community.¹⁸⁷

According to historian LaGumina, several Italian-American Catholic priests joined the war effort as Catholic military chaplains for reasons that not only differed from

¹⁸⁴ John W.Lanza, *Shot Down Over Italy*, 20.

¹⁸⁵ Istituto Storico della Resistenza in Toscana, “War and Ethnicity.”

¹⁸⁶ Among them, WAC Technician 5th Grade (T/5) Eleonor V. Spinola of Hilo, Hawaii, who served with 6669th Headquarters Platoon supporting the Fifth Army and was also decorated. “Women's Army Corps (WAC) Technician Eleanor V. Spinola Calculates the Distance from Hawaii to Italy,” Harry S. Truman Library & Museum, United States Army Signal Corps, accessed December 22, 2016, <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/photographs/view.php?id=48201>.

¹⁸⁷ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 72.

those who joined to become soldiers, airmen, sailors or marines, but that are also distinct from those of military chaplains of the other faiths and denominations. Father Anthony DeLaura, from Brooklyn, enlisted, received a commission and was assigned to the 85th Infantry Division, an outfit shipped to combat in Italy in late 1944. He considered it his duty to join as a way to bring comfort not only to Catholics Italian-Americans but to everyone who might need it.¹⁸⁸



Figure 2. WAC Technician (T/5) Eleanor V. Spinola of Hilo, Hawaii, calculates the distance from Hilo, Hawaii to where she is located in the San Marco area of Italy. At the time of the photograph, Spinola was assigned to the WAC 6669th Headquarters Platoon supporting the Fifth Army, April 16, 1944, Westray Battle Boyce Long Papers. Courtesy of United States Army Signal Corps, Harry S. Truman Library & Museum.

¹⁸⁸ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 130.

Those among the Italian-American community who displayed particularly great enthusiasm to serve were the veterans of World War I. After spearheading the anti-defamation effort in the period of the war prior to American intervention, several of them made their actions follow their words by heading to the recruitment offices, although only some of them served in Italy. Cornelius K. Granai, born in Barre, Vermont, but son of Northern Italians from Novara and Carrara, served in the United States Merchant Marine in World War I (enlisting in 1917), before volunteering again for service at forty-six years of age in 1943. In Italy, he acted as civil affairs officer in collaboration with the Allied Military Government of Military Territories (AMGOT).¹⁸⁹

In 1941 and early 1942, as the first campaigns in the Pacific were raging and attention was given to the Germans and the war in North Africa, seemingly the prospect of actual engagement against the Italian Armed Forces was overlooked by Italian-Americans in service. Quickly enough, however, the possibility (or, rather, the risk) of being sent to Italy started materializing as the military began to plan actions against the Italians in Africa to support the British. Since the American entrance into war, recruits were required to answer questionnaires that included one particular question in the case of Italian-Americans: they were asked if they were willing to fight against other Italians.¹⁹⁰ It is not clear if all Italian-American recruits received the same type of screening, and it appears that the Army did not adopt one single policy in this regards. The question, however, often appears in the stories of Italian-Americans who answered

¹⁸⁹ Cornelius K. Granai, and Edwin Granai, ed., *Letters from "Somewhere...": a Memoir of World War II* (Burlington, VT: Barnes Bay Press, 2000).

¹⁹⁰ Peter L. Belmonte, *Italian Americans in World War II*, 100-101.

positively to it in virtually all cases.¹⁹¹ Nonetheless, “clerks...often pointed out that most applicants ‘spent considerable time pondering the question that read, ‘if necessary, are you willing to take arms in defense of this country?’”¹⁹² No matter their answer, the fact that the U.S. military sometimes questioned Italian-Americans on the extent of their loyalty proved that the suspicion of the U.S. government towards them and their fear of an hypothetical Italian-American disloyalty had not been quenched yet.¹⁹³ Italian-Americans, who showed no hesitation in fighting the war, sometimes showed reluctance about possibly fighting Italians.

Young Italian-Americans surely felt the pressure of their families, desirous of proving their loyalty but scared at the prospect that their sons might be sent to fight Italians, friends and even relatives among them.¹⁹⁴ Author Joe Vergara exemplified the feeling of many Italian-Americans, especially first generation by asking himself, “If I was sent to Italy. Could I treat Italians as enemies – men just like Il Lungo, The Gink, Compa’ Francesco? Would I be able to pull the trigger if I saw one of Pop’s compa’s through the gun sight? When the time came, I told myself, I would do what I had to. But, all the same, I wondered.”¹⁹⁵ Unsurprisingly, many Italian-Americans rushed to the recruitment offices to join the Marines: in part because it was the most mythologized of the branches, but in good part because Marines were fighting in the Pacific, and fighting against the Japanese constituted the most effective way to do their duty while avoiding the upsetting

¹⁹¹ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 239-240.

¹⁹² Stephen Puleo, *The Boston Italians*, 200.

¹⁹³ Richard L’Aquila, Sgt. in the Army Air Forces who saw only stateside service during the war claims that the U.S. military shipped Italian-Americans mainly to the PTO as a result of the mistrust of their loyalty, but the claim is not supported by other sources: see Philip L. Aquila, Mary Aquila, and Richard Aquila, eds., *Home Front Soldier: The Story of a G.I. and His Italian-American Family in World War II* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 42.

¹⁹⁴ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 239.

¹⁹⁵ Stefano Luconi, “Italian Americans and the Invasion of Sicily in World War II,” 6.

possibility of fighting against Italians. This is, for example, what happened on The Hill, St. Louis' Italian neighborhood. Roland DeGregorio, one of them, said to his Italian-born father that "The Marines are fighting in the Pacific, and I won't fight against your brother and your cousins in Italy."¹⁹⁶

Pfc. Albert DeFazio, drafted in 1942, was asked during his interview at Fort Meade what branch he wanted to join and answered "the Marines." The recruiting officer suggested to try another branch, and DeFazio picked the Navy. He was finally put in the Army, and DeFazio was led to ask "Why did you ask me what branch of service I wanted to go if you knew all along you was gonna put me in the Army?"¹⁹⁷ Agosto J. Sorrentino, from Brooklyn, New York, volunteered for service in the Army but told his family that he had been drafted afterward: he had two uncles in the Italian army that he could face in combat.¹⁹⁸ Twin brothers Anthony and Alfonso Brandolino, from Luzerne county, Pennsylvania both enlisted the same day, on August 28, 1942. Together, they volunteered for the Army paratroopers and would go to serve together, in the same squad, Company A, 509th Paratrooper Infantry Battalion (PIB), in North Africa and Italy.¹⁹⁹

When directly asked how they saw the prospect of being sent to fight other Italians, Italian-American servicemen once again articulated a variety of responses. Many, in complete coherence with their professed American identity, claimed, for example of not to have any qualms whatsoever in facing the Italians. Domenic Melso, for

¹⁹⁶ Stefano Luconi, "Italian Americans and the Invasion of Sicily in World War II," 6.

¹⁹⁷ Albert DeFazio, Sr., interview by James M. Zanella.

¹⁹⁸ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 80.

¹⁹⁹ Gerard M. Devlin, *Paratrooper!: The Saga of U.S. Army and Marine Parachute and Glider Combat Troops During World War II* (New York, NY: St. Martin Press, 1979), 322-323.

example, declared that he had no feelings for the Italians, and “never did.”²⁰⁰ Fred Monteleone did not want to go in the Pacific, and at the first opportunity joined the OSS to go in the Mediterranean theater.²⁰¹ Other Italian-Americans, instead, still ready to serve in any theater of war, including Italy, expressed distaste at the idea. Sgt. Dominic Storino, the son of Calabrian immigrants and raised in Chicago, Illinois, put the issue in terms of mere necessity for survival: “I felt bad for the country because my parents were from there and my relatives were there...but, you gotta job to do and you gotta do it. It’s your survival against theirs.”²⁰² Daniel J. Petruzzi, despite being a third-generation Italian-American from Hazelton, Pennsylvania, who considered himself “one-hundred percent American,” could not avoid feeling the prospect of fighting other Italians in his war against his own ancestors as “crazy” and “unpleasant” at least. In particular, he found that worse than fighting other human beings in war was the “killing people of our ancient blood.”²⁰³

In some instances, the aims of the war against Italy were subject to a profound reinterpretation by Italian-Americans in service, and, in their own specific terms, they even welcomed the prospect of fighting against Italy. Airman Carlo Ginobile was perhaps the most pragmatic, in pointing out that service in the Fifteenth Air Force in Italy he had it easier than his colleagues in the United Kingdom with the Eighth Air Force, who were suffering a much higher casualty rate.²⁰⁴ Max Corvo, from Middletown, Connecticut, and one of the most influential individuals behind the constitution of a units of OSS agents

²⁰⁰ Domenic Melso, interview by Sandra Stewart Holyoak and Joseph Pante.

²⁰¹ *Fighting Paisanos*, directed by Marco Curti.

²⁰² Linda Grisolia, “An Italian in Italy” War Stories, *Fra Noi*, October 2010.

²⁰³ Daniel J. Petruzzi, *My War Against the Land of My Ancestors*, 18.

²⁰⁴ Carlo J. Ginobile, interview by Sandra Stewart Holyoak and Jeneann Robinson

operating in Italy, considered his duty to help Italians by destroying Mussolini and his fascist regime.²⁰⁵

“Al” Soria, arrived in the United States in 1940, and son of the Chief Executive Officer of the FIAT industries in Torino, Italy, was a *Balilla*, in one of the different organizations of the Fascist Youth before leaving the country. Having escaped from Italy to avoid the consequences of the racial laws of the regime (his family was Jewish), he defined the Fascism a “brainwash” and went on to enlist in the U.S. Army, because “liberating Italy from Fascism was something he always wanted to do.”²⁰⁶ A closer look, however, reveals that effectively what these Italian-Americans wanted to combat was not other Italians, but, as *Why We Fight* indicated, Mussolini and the Fascist regime. John L. Cuneo, defining himself an “American soldier” but from “Italian parents” and writing on the pages of *Il Corriere del Popolo* stated that “it would be a pleasure to fight against that assistant butcher (Mussolini) who gets all his orders from the chief butcher...Hitler.”²⁰⁷ The particular angle of interpretation a war specifically against the Fascist regime, and not against Italians as a whole, often reemerged in the rare instances in which Italian-Americans found themselves in combat against with Italian soldiers.

In some instances, American servicemen shipped to Italy expressed disappointment for being sent to what they considered a secondary theater, perhaps even minor to the Pacific campaign, and not to the grandinvasion of Europe. The same bitterness, however, could not be found in any of the cases of Italian-American servicemen examined. In the light of their personal connections with Italy or their

²⁰⁵Max Corvo, *Max Corvo: OSS Italy 1942-1945 – A Personal Memoir of the Fight for Freedom*. (New York, NY: Enigma Books, 2005), 1.

²⁰⁶*Fighting Paisanos* directed by Marco Curti.

²⁰⁷John L. Cuneo, “A Fifth Column On the Spot,” *Corriere del Popolo*, January 22, 1942.

personal re-interpretations of the war aims, they expressed distaste or, oppositely, considered their service in the Italian campaign as important for the overall war effort. In either case, however, for Italian-Americans, their military service in Italy never proved insignificant and unimportant.

Once Italy officially became enemy of the United States in 1941, Italian language, until then often perceived as a proof of disloyalty by Italian immigrants, became an enemy language, eliciting suspicion and hostility from Americans.²⁰⁸ The use of Italian, along with German or Japanese, was publicly discouraged by American war propaganda that instructed “Don’t speak the enemy language! Speak American.”²⁰⁹ Once again, however, Italian-Americans did not react by closing in their communities even more and emphasizing their speaking of Italian. Amidst demonstrations of loyalty across the nation, Italian-Americans proved their loyalty by stopping speaking Italian. Many Italians individually were convinced by the atmosphere of suspicion and out of shame to suppress the use of the Italian language.²¹⁰ More in general, however, the effort to switch to English appeared the result of a concerted and conscious effort by the Italian-American community. While the newspapers of the many Italian-American communities, the only source of information for older Italian immigrants who could not speak English, continued to be written in Italian, their readers stopped teaching Italian to their sons and daughters, while all names remotely connected to the Italian regime disappeared.²¹¹

²⁰⁸ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 115-118; Nancy C. Carnevale, “No Italian Spoken for the Duration of the War,” 9.

²⁰⁹ Anthony V. Riccio, *The Italian American Experience in New Haven*, 280; Nancy C. Carnevale, “No Italian Spoken for the Duration of the War,” 10.

²¹⁰ Anthony V. Riccio, *The Italian American Experience in New Haven*, 280.

²¹¹ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 293.

Whereas in the early decades of the twentieth century Italian-Americans decided to emphasize the use of their native language to achieve unite against American discrimination, in the 1940s they were seeking the same objective by speaking English. In this way, they were proving their loyalty to the fullest extent, by giving up one of their most cherished national traits and proving Americans their prejudice false.²¹²

Despite the public discrimination against speaking Italian on the home front, the U.S. government and the military also understood the usefulness of Italian for military matters, especially when they started planning for Operation Husky, the invasion of Sicily, as the Tunisian campaign was coming to a close in early 1943.²¹³ The *Bellingham Herald* of Bellingham, Washington, listed Italian-Americans as an additional asset available to General Mark Clark for conducting a campaign in Italy because were “most familiar with their homeland and have many contacts there.”²¹⁴ This would result, as the next chapter will show, in the support of Max Corvo’s effort in constituting the Italian Secret Intelligence (SI) Section of the OSS by the U.S. military, the recruitment of Italian-speaking individuals for the task.²¹⁵ More generally, in the American units bound for combat in Italy, servicemen of Italian descent were assigned roles of interpreters and began to be appreciated by their comrades exactly because of their origins, their language skills, and their knowledge of Italian territory and culture. This effectively represented a reversal of the ethnic discrimination that had characterized the lives of Italian-Americans for their whole lives.

²¹² Anthony V. Riccio, *The Italian American Experience in New Haven*, 286.

²¹³ Nancy C. Carnevale, “No Italian Spoken for the Duration of the War,” 16.

²¹⁴ Harrison Salisbury, “Strategy for Knocking Italy Out is Far Advanced; Coup d’Etat Problem,” *Bellingham Herald* (Bellingham, Washington), May 17, 1943; Nancy C. Carnevale, “No Italian Spoken for the Duration of the War,” 13.

²¹⁵ Max Corvo, *Max Corvo: OSS Italy 1942-1945*, 16-22.

In a few years, between the late 1930s and 1941, Italian-Americans had made the choice of supporting the United States and committed themselves in the war against Mussolini's regime. Throughout they found a way to remain faithful to both cultures and nations: by proving loyalty to the United States through their military service and at the same time maintaining the loyalty to the family and acting against the Fascist government.²¹⁶ By wearing their working outfits in the production plants and their uniforms in training camps, by buying war bonds and vocally publicly supporting the war against the Fascist tyranny, they had proven their loyalty to the American people beyond any doubt.²¹⁷ Mississippi Senator Theodore Bilbo continued to have deep reservations about the loyalty of Italian-Americans, which he expressed by answering to Josephine Piccolo and addressing her as "My Dear Dago."²¹⁸ Except for similar rare instances, wartime Italian-American participation had otherwise won wide acceptance within American society.

The Roosevelt administration, however, kept harboring suspicion of Italian-American loyalty. In first place, naturalization through passage of literacy tests continued to be required by Italian enemy aliens under fifty years of age. More than this, however, the government proved its fear of possible issues of divided loyalties by Italian-Americans by secretly establishing camps of Italian prisoners of war coming from North Africa.²¹⁹ In fact, the government was fearful that public knowledge of the presence of Italian POWs on American territory could in some way arouse Italian-American support

²¹⁶ Gambino Richard, *Blood of My Blood*, 287.

²¹⁷ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 294.

²¹⁸ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 156.

²¹⁹ *Prisoners in Paradise*, directed by Camilla Calamandrei, DVD (Istituto Luce, 2001); Carlo Ferroni, *Italian POWs Speak Out At Last: Italian Prisoners of War Break their Silence* (Amherst, NY: Teneo Press, 2013).

for Italy. The secret was not disclosed to the American public until the press leaked it in mid-1942, causing considerable irritation in particular among the Italian-American community, resulting again in a decline for the support of Roosevelt that would tell in the 1944 elections.²²⁰

²²⁰ Stefano Luconi, "WWII and Italian-American Voters," in *Italian Americans*, 68.

CHAPTER IV – “THEY THOUGHT WE WERE GANGSTERS, THE FIRST GUN THEY GAVE US WAS A SUBMACHINE GUN”: ITALIAN-AMERICAN SERVICEMEN IN TRAINING AND COMBAT

Italian-Americans, like all other Americans, from all over the United States left their homes for the boot camp and then for war. In training, they encountered widespread acceptance and minimal residual traces of the strong discrimination that had hit Italian-Americans in the 1920s and 1930s. Once sent overseas for combat, the uneasiness deriving from fighting against other Italians resurfaced in the initial operations against Italy, to largely disappear in their minds soon afterward, with the Armistice of the Italian Kingdom on September 8, 1943. After that, Italian-Americans still had to fight and risk their lives in Italy, but from then on mainly against the Germans and only very limitedly against other Italians (the military forces of the reconstituted Fascist regime in the northern Italy, the Repubblica Sociale Italiana or RSI). Therefore in many respects the experience of Italian-Americans in training and on the frontlines in Italy approximated that of the American GI and other servicemen: a long, slow, and bloody war of attrition on difficult terrain and terrible weather marked by the names of many battlefields – Gela, Salerno, San Pietro, Venafrò, Cassino, Anzio, and the Gothic Line.

Having grown up being hailed as “dago,” “wop,” and “guinea” Italian-American recruits in the training camps across the U.S. between 1941 and 1945 surprisingly encountered very little racial discrimination. It was in great part the result of the progress of the assimilation process afoot long before the war, but it was also the result of the recognition by American recruits that the Italian-Americans alongside them were wearing the same uniforms and had made the same choice of fighting for the United States.

Referring to the ethnic rivalry existing between Irish and Italians, for example, Salvatore “Gary” Garibaldi, Army soldier who fought in Italy from Salerno onwards, acknowledges that it was intense before the war. That, however, “more or less stopped with World War II. Men and women we traveled not only throughout the country but now we’re going overseas.”²²¹ Mario Iafolla denies any discrimination right away, also considering that, in addition to Italian-Americans, “there were a lot of people who were foreign-born or first generation, some of them that spoke broken English even or had had names that were unpronounceable in the country at that time.”²²² Bruno Ghiringhelli, son of northern Italian immigrants from north of Milan, also found that there was no antagonism towards Italian-Americans simply because “there were a lot of Italian-American soldiers.”²²³ 2nd Lt. Daniel Petruzzi, however, was convinced that the dislike towards him by his superior officer, resulting in himself not being promoted 1st Lieutenant like all other candidates, was somewhat related to his Italian ethnicity. In fact, the colonel constantly accused him of unduly defending his “New York or Brooklyn Italian GIs” because of ethnic group loyalty.²²⁴

In some cases, older prejudice than the one against Italians prevailed, with Italians being associated with northern Americans in a resurgence of the sectional divide against southerners. Ignazio Bellafigliore tells that after being drafted, he ended up in the 36th Infantry Division, a Texas National Guard Unit that had been mobilized for service in 1940, despite being from New York. Soon, rivalry between the recruits from the northern states and those from the southern states developed, and Iafolla was

²²¹ Anthony V. Riccio, *The Italian American Experience in New Haven*, 358.

²²² Mario Iafolla, interview by Nicholas Ciotola.

²²³ Bruno Ghiringhelli, interview by Dominic Rios.

²²⁴ Daniel J. Petruzzi, *My War Against the Land of My Ancestors*, 43.

automatically accepted in the first group as a “Yankee,” calling the others “stupid Rebels.”²²⁵ Soon enough, hard training made all the “T-Patchers,” as the soldiers of the division were called, quickly get over their sectional differences.

The racial dislike towards Italian-Americans had not simply been completely forgotten over the decades, but was consciously being thrown aside. In fact, the stereotypes of Italian-Americans impressed on the American society over the decades remained, and sometimes resurfaced with an attempt of coloring them in a positive light. Vito D’Alessandro, from Chicago, reported for example being handed the Thompson submachinegun or “Tommygun,” made famous by gangster movies, as soon as they found out his origins because they thought he would be skilled at using it.²²⁶ Wartime association with the Mafia by the Italian-Americans featured on *5,000 Miles from Home* caused them to express disgust, but it did not cause them to be ashamed of their roots.²²⁷ The fact that Americans had not forgotten racial prejudice against Italians, but that were simply not applying it to Italian-Americans anymore, was proven by the cowardly depiction of Italian POWs in some American newspapers, witnessed by Daniel Petruzzi during the Mojave Desert maneuvers in late 1942. “Despite the fact that I was three generations removed from Italy,” continues Petruzzi, “the coverage made my blood boil.”²²⁸

In most cases, acceptance by the rest of the American recruits did translate into complete integration with them. In some cases, however, Italian-Americans who had spent their good parts of their lives hanging out with other children from their

²²⁵ Ignazio Bellafigliore, interview by Andrew Amari.

²²⁶ *5,000 Miles from Home* directed by Jim DiStasio, and Mark McCutcheon.

²²⁷ *5,000 Miles from Home* directed by Jim DiStasio, and Mark McCutcheon.

²²⁸ Daniel J. Petruzzi, *My War Against the Land of My Ancestors*, 45.

neighborhood and later working alongside Italian colleagues, continued to stick together in military service. John Lanza's "buddy" in the 26th Infantry Division, before being transferred into the Army Air Forces, was Frank Alvino.²²⁹ Frank Carafa, Technical Sergeant in the 85th Infantry Regiment, 10th Mountain Division, was close to many Italian-American buddies in his unit, and Albert Onesti, from Chicago, Illinois, but born from northern Italian parents, bonded with Mike Narducci, also from the "Windy City."²³⁰

In general, Italian-Americans went through training with no exceptional experiences related to their ethnicity. Before being transferred to the 36th "Texas" Division, Albert DeFazio went through a tough basic training that included twenty-five miles hikes, as part of the 69th Infantry Division at Camp Shelby, in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.²³¹ Domenic Melso was impressed by the seriousness of the training he underwent, probably intensified by the Army in the frenzy of the pre-war period, which included lessons in the use of all types of guns, including captured German weapons.²³² 2nd Lt. Joseph DeMasi was one of the relatively few Italian-Americans, among the sample, to receive a commission as officer in the Army. In the Airborne, he went through advanced infantry training, heavy weapons school, and then parachute school, a physically and mentally demanding experience that he faced with a "gung-ho" attitude.²³³

²²⁹ John W. Lanza, *Shot Down Over Italy*, 21.

²³⁰ Frank D. Carafa, interview by *Frontline*, "Frank Carafa, World War II Veteran Who Rescued Lt. Dole on the Battlefield in Italy," accessed August 1, 2016, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/choice/bob/carafa.html>; Linda Grisolia, "Don't Be Afraid to Die!," *Fra Noi*, September 2006.

²³¹ Albert DeFazio was later transferred in Company A, 143rd Infantry Regiment, 36th "Texas" Infantry Division. See Albert DeFazio, Sr., interview by James M. Zanella.

²³² Domenic Melso, interview by Sandra Stewart Holyoak and Joseph Pante.

²³³ Joseph V. DeMasi, interview by G. Kurt Piehler and Tara Liston.

Technician 4th Class (T/4) Frank C. Palilla, born in the Lower East Side of Manhattan from Sicilian parents, underwent his basic training at Camp Grant, Illinois. His knowledge in music could have granted him service in the Special Services, by playing piano entertaining the troops, but he was looking for action. Ineligible for Officers' School because at age eighteen he was too young, he applied to Medical Technician School, undergoing an intensive specialized training of six months to become a Surgical Technician or "combat medic," like Sgt. Isadore Valenti.²³⁴ Robert P. Argentine was receiving artillery training at Fort Meade, Maryland, when the military decided it needed more truck drivers and cut his training short.²³⁵ An exception to a largely ordinary training experience by Italian-Americans happened to "Nino" DiBenedetto, an Italian immigrant who had come to the United States only in 1937, whose incapability of speaking English did not prevent him from getting drafted into the Army. Once in training he was incapable at properly responding to roll call, understanding orders and regulations, and the problems stemming from this quickly led to an early discharge.²³⁶

Military service meant for many Italian-Americans undergoing training away from home and getting the chance of seeing the country. Carlo Ginobile, for example, took mechanic training in Atlantic City, New Jersey, and then in Lincoln, Nebraska. Later on, he proceeded to Kingman, Arizona for aerial gunnery school, during which time he was even able to fly into the Grand Canyon in a training plane, before moving on to Casper, Wyoming. As Ginobile acknowledged, having the opportunity to visit the

²³⁴ Frank C. Palilla, interview by John Coates.

²³⁵ Robert P. Argentine, interview by James M. Zanella.

²³⁶ Anthony V. Riccio, *The Italian American Experience in New Haven*, 314.

country was a great experience.²³⁷ Although Mario Iafolla signed up for both the U.S. Navy and the Marines when he turned seventeen, with his parents' consent, in 1939, he remained two years on the waiting list, due to pre-war low levels of enlistment. When both the U.S.M.C. and the Navy finally accepted his request 1940, he decided to chose the latter, "because I wanted to travel; that was one of my ambitions too."²³⁸ Bruno Ghiringhelli, from Rutherford, California, much enjoyed the skiing he did as part of his training with the 10th Mountain Division in Camp Hale, Colorado, after previous training and deployment on Kiska, Aleutian Islands, Alaska.²³⁹

In several cases the war, and specifically the war in Italy, represented the opening up of a new series of opportunities for Italian-Americans recruits, deemed valuable because of their language skills and cultural background.²⁴⁰ In short, "The Second World War then offered an opportunity primarily to second-generation Italian Americans, to use Italian to demonstrate their patriotism."²⁴¹ Daniel Petruzzi, for example was selected as interrogator of Italian prisoners.²⁴² The story of the Italian Section of the Secret Intelligence division of the OSS started with Private (Pvt.) Max Corvo, a Middletown, Connecticut resident, with Sicilian parents. He himself, as a private, first developed the plans for "subversive warfare against Sicily" in June 1942.²⁴³ The U.S. military, even at the lowest levels, demonstrated a great deal of flexibility towards innovative ideas, such as relying on Italian-Americans, anti-fascist Italian immigrants and political refugees. As a result, Max Corvo's ideas made their way from his superior officer while in training to

²³⁷ Carlo J. Ginobile, interview by Sandra Stewart Holyoak and Jeneann Robinson.

²³⁸ Mario Iafolla, interview by Nicholas Ciotola.

²³⁹ Bruno Ghiringhelli, interview by Dominic Rios.

²⁴⁰ Nancy C. Carnevale, "No Italian Spoken for the Duration of the War," 17-19.

²⁴¹ Nancy C. Carnevale, "No Italian Spoken for the Duration of the War," 19.

²⁴² Daniel J. Petruzzi, *My War Against the Land of My Ancestors*, 48.

²⁴³ Max Corvo, *Max Corvo: OSS Italy 1942-1945*, 4.

Washington D.C by late 1942. The OSS quickly created the Italian SI Section, tasked with the duty of preceding the advance of the Allied armies in Sicily and Italy and collecting useful intelligence to facilitate it. Preference for recruitment was given to those Italian-Americans or Italian-born individuals who had grown up learning to speak Italian at home. In this way, “they would speak the language more like the natives. They would know not only the spoken languages, but also the facial expression and body language which are part of the oral communication.”²⁴⁴

The special training given to OSS agents and to those of the Counter-Intelligence Corps (CIC) like “Al” Gallo, from Chicago, Illinois, however, included sessions on how to blend in with the Italian population, speaking the local dialect, act, dress up like Italians and even eat like them.²⁴⁵ The U.S. Army paid almost no attention to the legal status of those individuals that were understood to be crucial for the Italian SI Section, recruiting even former Fascist bureaucrats and anti-fascists exiles who were not in theory allowed to serve because Italian citizens very recently arrived to the United States. The FBI, which had not been informed by the OSS on its activities, was alarmed when unusually high numbers of Italians flocked into Washington D.C. to undertake secret special training.²⁴⁶ Later on, the Army even foresaw the possibility of recruiting among the Italian POWs of the British North African campaign.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁴ Emilio T. Caruso, “Italian-American Operational Groups of the O.S.S.” in *Gli americani e la guerra di liberazione in Italia – Office of Strategic Services (OSS) e la resistenza italiana: atti del convegno internazionale di studi storici, Venezia, 17-18 Ottobre 1994 (The Americans and the War for Liberation in Italy – Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and the Italian Resistance: Acts of the International Conference for Historical Studies, Venice, October 17-18, 1994)* (Rome, Italy: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1995), 218.

²⁴⁵ *5,000 Miles from Home* directed by Jim DiStasio and Mark McCutcheon.

²⁴⁶ Max Corvo, *Max Corvo: OSS Italy 1942-1945*, 35.

²⁴⁷ Max Corvo, *Max Corvo: OSS Italy 1942-1945*, 35.

Personnel originally from all parts of Italy went into Italian SI Section of the OSS, but teams made by agents of specific origins, like the Sardinian volunteers led by Tony Camboni, were constituted when actions in their particular regions were planned, to deal at best with the local dialects and features of the territory.²⁴⁸ In other cases, however, some agents had the exceptional ability of speaking several dialects simultaneously, in addition to standard Italian. The task of the Italian SI Section always rested on a basis of idealism shared by Max Corvo (promoted to 1st Lt.) and all the other Italian-American agents that their efforts were not only directed at winning the war for the Allies but also in liberating Italy from Fascism and restoring democracy there. For these reasons, the Italian SI Section's mission was not completely supported by the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) and Special Operation Executive (SOE), as well as by the U.S. Naval Intelligence, and other sections of the OSS where the influence of committed Italian-Americans was minor.²⁴⁹ In some cases, prejudice against southern-Italians (often identified with the undesirable Italian immigrants) came to be used to more effectively conduct political attacks against the Italian SI Section. For example, officials within the OSS opined that the Italian SI Section could not be effective in its role of encouraging the surrender of the Italian civilian and military leaders, or promote the possibility of future cooperation with them because it was largely composed by Sicilian Italian-Americans. According to these officials, the OSS Sicilian-Americans, in fact, shared a worrisome group loyalty and were despised by many within the Italian military and government, of

²⁴⁸ Max Corvo, *Max Corvo: OSS Italy 1942-1945*, 22.

²⁴⁹ Max Corvo, *Max Corvo: OSS Italy 1942-1945*, 73.

mainly northern Italian origins.²⁵⁰ Ultimately, these influences would lead to the inclusion in the unit of personnel who, according to Max Corvo, were not qualified because they did not speak Italian, much less understand the Italian mentality and temperament.²⁵¹

Nonetheless, service in the Italian SI Section led by 1st Lt. Max Corvo represented only a small niche for the many Italian-Americans who underwent training and mostly served in more traditional roles in the war in Italy. Chief Storekeeper Mario Iafolla, tired of being stationed in Trinidad signed up to become an intelligence agent in 1943. He was aware that the U.S. Naval Intelligence was interested in constituting teams of undercover agents, who would pretend to be Italian fishermen operating on small fishing boats that in reality were carrying supplies and ammunitions to Yugoslavian partisans across the Adriatic. After reporting for duty at the Headquarters of the Eight Fleet in Algiers, Algeria, he was redirected instead for a more traditional duty as superintendent at the Naples naval supply base.²⁵² Except for special roles in the military intelligence units, Italian-Americans lived a training experience that, much like real combat in Italy itself, was not inherently different from that of other Americans. In good part for these reasons, the historiography of World War II has neglected to study in detail the experience of Italian-American servicemen. Just like their American comrades-in-arms, Italian-Americans soon left their training camps bound overseas for war.

²⁵⁰ As Max Corvo's son, William Corvo, points out in the preface, both accusations were false, because of the Italian SI Section's variety in the origins of its personnel, as well as the fact that the Italian military and political leadership was not predominantly northern. See Max Corvo, *Max Corvo: OSS Italy 1942-1945*, xvi-xvii.

²⁵¹ Max Corvo, *Max Corvo: OSS Italy 1942-1945*, 139.

²⁵² Mario Iafolla, interview by Nicholas Ciotola.

For many of them, the destination was Sicily and Italy, and the sight of the Italian coast produced emotional responses. The “Italian-American troops” onboard Fire Controlman Third Class Jack Wylie’s transport ship on their way to the Mediterranean were in apprehension, but “when they finally set out for the invasion...they realized it was the Germans, and not the Italians that they had to defeat.”²⁵³ Private First Class (Pfc.) Albert DeFazio reported having a “funny feeling” as soon as he spotted Sicilian land while on its way from Oran, Algeria, to Salerno, to take part to “Operation Avalanche,” the landing at Salerno in September 1943. He could not avoid thinking that that was the land where his parents were born and had probably been their last sight of Italy on their way from Naples to New York.²⁵⁴ Fred Monteleone, son of Sicilian parents, was overwhelmed by a strange sensation upon seeing the coast of Campania, a mix of happiness and the feeling of having already been there somehow.²⁵⁵ Anthony Costanzo, from Jamestown, New York, a corporal in the famed 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st “Big Red One” Division, simply commented: “Sicily, Jesus Christ! My grandma lives in Sicily!.”²⁵⁶

For Pfc. Nick Scardina, who had never left his neighborhood in Youngstown, Ohio, before being drafted in 1944, coming to Italy felt just like being lost in a foreign country. Although conscious of his Italian roots, Scardina did not know where his parents were from, and never bothered to investigate: in the U.S. he was an Italian-American no

²⁵³ “Prayer, Meditation Comforted Soldiers on Eve of Invasion,” in *Back From the Wars*, *Evening Star*.

²⁵⁴ Albert DeFazio, Sr., interview by James M. Zanella.

²⁵⁵ *Fighting Paisanos*, directed by Marco Curti.

²⁵⁶ Roland E. Kidder, *A Hometown Went to War: Remembrances of World War II* (Chautauqua, NY: Sandy Bottom Press, 1996), 59.

matter the specifics.²⁵⁷ In Italy, however, the ignorance of his own origins did not create a sense of connection with any place and made him feel like a foreigner. Pfc. Vincent W. Cangelo, from Brooklyn, New York, felt “comfortable” with the idea of being shipped to Italy in late 1944, because he had grown up speaking Italian, being surrounded by Italians, and was familiar with Italian manners. In his words, Pfc. Vincent Cangelo, in Italy felt “at home.”²⁵⁸

Aside from preliminary intelligence raids in Sardinia conducted by the Italian SI Section, Sicily represented the first objective of an uncertain Allied strategy in the Mediterranean that did not firmly foresee a continuation on the Italian mainland after it, without, at the same time ruling it out completely.²⁵⁹ In 1943 Italy was still an active player in the war on the Axis side, and “Operation Husky,” as the invasion of Sicily would finally be code-named, foresaw opposition to the landings by the Italian units on the island. As noted by historian Stefano Luconi, Italian-Americans in the United States reacted to the first major Allied operation on Italian soil in a variety of ways.²⁶⁰ On one hand, they wanted to show complete allegiance to the United States and were emphatically committed to the cause of war against Fascism. On the other hand, they were understandably troubled by the prospect of seeing members of their community sent to fight other Italians in Sicily. The leadership of Roosevelt, already stained in the eyes of

²⁵⁷ Linda Grisolia, “Luck of the Draw,” War Stories, *Fra Noi*, May 2010.

²⁵⁸ Pfc. Vincent Cangelo never imagined his service in Italy would take him to be the official interpreter for his battalion’s headquarters and his heritage being so useful in Italy. See Vincent W. Cangelo, interview by Lorna Griess, n.d, Sacramento, CA, video interview, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington D.C, accessed January 28, 2017, <http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.50255/mv0001001.stream>.

²⁵⁹ For more information on the inter-Allied debate in regards to the post-North African strategy in the Mediterranean and the SYMBOL Conference in Casablanca, in January 1943 see Carlo D’Este, *Bitter Victory: The Battle for Sicily, 1943*(New York, E.P. Dutton, 1988).

²⁶⁰ Stefano Luconi, “Italian Americans and the Invasion of Sicily in World War II,” 6.

Italian-Americans for his stab-in-the-back speech of 1940 as well as the enemy alien designation of Italian citizens, had become less than galvanizing for Italian-Americans ordered to invade Sicily and fight against other Italians. Lastly, his demand for an of an “unconditional surrender” by Italy, Germany, and Japan made after the conference of Casablanca further displeased Italian-Americans, who were hoping for lenient terms for it and reconstruction efforts after the conquest.

For Francesco Biamonte, writing in the pages of the *Columbus Dispatch*, continuation of the war and the “broken record” of the demand for unconditional surrender equated insulting Italy and loyal Italian-Americans, and “missing the bus” of true cooperation.²⁶¹ In fact, Italian-Americans were hoping for mild and honorable terms of surrender for their country of origin.²⁶² At the end, however, Italian-Americans decided to support Operation Husky, also because Allied conquest would bring an end to the bombing raids of the island and start the liberation from the Fascist oppression, as the *Oakland Tribune* and the *Advocate* noted.²⁶³ Nonetheless, the Italian-American community and the ethnic press continued to maintain an important pressure on the American government for moderate terms of surrender and material help for the reconstruction of the island.²⁶⁴

Many of the Italian-American servicemen who would fight in Sicily had already come into contact with Italian POWs while stationed in North Africa. These prisoners-of-war, much like the Italian soldiers they would soon face in Italy, were rarely seen by

²⁶¹ Francesco Biamonte, “Italian-American Thinks U. S. ‘Missed the Bus,’” *Columbus Dispatch*, August 30, 1943.

²⁶² Stefano Luconi, “Italian Americans and the Invasion of Sicily in World War II,” 12.

²⁶³ “N.Y. Italians Glad for People ‘At Home,’” *Oakland Tribune*, July 11, 1943; “Italo-Americans Here Glad Over Allied Invasion,” *Advocate*, July 11, 1943,.

²⁶⁴ Stefano Luconi, “Italian Americans and the Invasion of Sicily in World War II,” 18; Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 172-173.

Italian-Americans as full enemies, unlike the Germans or the Japanese, as Capra's *Why We Fight* suggested.²⁶⁵ *Sahara*, a 1943 movie set in North Africa proposed the same angle: the crew of an American tank lost in the desert led by commander Joe Gunn, played by Humphrey Bogart, included a stranded Italian POW named Giuseppe, presented as a repentant human being simply wishing to survive.²⁶⁶ For example, Sgt. Isadore Valenti and his comrades had no qualms about fraternizing with the Italian POWs they encountered in Tunisia and taking pictures with them. By bartering with them, Sgt. Valenti obtained a pair of German binoculars.²⁶⁷ Cpl. Samuel Buretta, from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, serving with the 45th "Thunderbird" Infantry Division was temporarily put in charge of Italian soldiers captured in Sicily, and commented:

It hurt me to see those men behind barbed wire because I knew in my heart that they didn't want to fight us in the first place, and now only wanted to go home. So, while I had them, I put them to work in humane ways. I put my heart and soul into that job. When I saw them being cheated on rations, with bread and other staples being diverted for personal gain by others, I fought for them and put a stop to the practice real fast.²⁶⁸

In another case, despite the communication difficulties deriving from his ability to speak only a Sicilian dialect with a group of Italian officers who spoke Italian, interrogator Sgt. James Anello thought that "they were good boys and we got along just

²⁶⁵ Evelyn Monahan and Rosemary Neider-Grenlee, report a common occurrences of fraternization between American soldiers, and in particular Italian-Americans, and Italian POWs during Operation Torch. In particular, this happened because one of the Italian prisoners was actually an American resident who had remained stuck in Italy while visiting and the hostilities had broken out. Subsequently, he was pressed into military service by the Fascist authorities and captured by the Americans, to whom he could ask for "Lucky Strikes in perfect English." See Evelyn Monahan and Rosemary Neider-Grenlee, *And If I Perish: Frontline U.S. Army Nurses in World War II* (New York, NY: Knopf, 2003), 60.

²⁶⁶ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 159; *Sahara*, directed by Zoltán Korda, DVD (Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2001).

²⁶⁷ Isadore Valenti, *Combat Medic: Stories of a Combat Medic, Co. K, 7th Infantry Regiment, the Third Infantry Division, During World War II in Europe* (Tarenton, PA: Word Association Publishers, 1998), 39.

²⁶⁸ Louis E. Keefer, *Italian Prisoners of War in America (1942-1946): Captives or Allies?* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1992), 14.

fine.”²⁶⁹ Sgt. Domenic Melso, an M3 light tank commander with the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mechanized), arrived in Algiers in early 1943 and seemingly felt a strong dislike for the Italians POWs there. Many approached him by telling him they had relatives in the United States, but Sgt. Melso did not prove sympathy for them and did not talk to them. Domenic Melso’s dislike for Italians, however, was not the type reserved to enemies, but one resulting from unspeakable delusion and disgust for the alliance of former fellow countrymen with Germany and Japan.²⁷⁰

On July 10, 1943, the Allies landed in Sicily, and “Italian-Yanks” among them, as *Register Republic* reported, were blasting their way through the island.²⁷¹ 3rd Infantry Division’s Sgt. Frank Mancuso, from New Orleans, Louisiana, landed from a Landing Craft Tank (LCT) on the beaches of Licata that early morning. He was the leader of one of many anti-tank squads that should have prevented en-masse attacks by Italian and German armor against the landing American infantry. In reality, they were nothing more than a handful of men mounted on an halftruck towing a 57mm gun, and only the difficult Sicilian terrain prevented attacks directly on the beachhead by enemy tanks. The landing was “one of the roughest experiences” that Sgt. Frank Mancuso ever lived, and he spent a long time dodging enemy artillery shells on the beach before being able to advance beyond it.²⁷² For his part, Isadore Valenti’s LCT, hit a sandbar and, after swimming ashore, spent several hours on the same beach as Frank Mancuso under enemy

²⁶⁹ Louis E. Keefer, *Italian Prisoners of War in America*, 33.

²⁷⁰ Domenic Melso, interview by Sandra Stewart Holyoak and Joseph Pante.

²⁷¹ C. R. Cunningham, “Italian-Yanks’ Blast Sicily – American Troops of Sicilian Descent in Thick of Allied Push,” *Register Republic*(Rockford, IL), July 17, 1943.

²⁷² Frank Mancuso, interview by Tommy Lofton, May 13, 2008, New Orleans, LA., video interview,, Oral Histories Collection, National WWII Museum, New Orleans, LA, accessed January 28, 2017, <http://www.ww2online.org/view/frank-mancuso/segment-1>.

fire trying to tend after wounded soldiers.²⁷³ In the case of Joseph J. Amoroso, Gunner's Mate of a Landing Craft Infantry (LCI), he was paralyzed by fear and unable to shoot back when the entire beach exploded with enemy fire, after a semblance of total calm.²⁷⁴ In the rehearsals during the days before the Sicilian D-Day, paratrooper Joseph DeMasi had become particularly well-liked in his unit and considered a valuable asset because of his ability to speak Italian and familiarity with the territory. In the first days of Operation Husky, with the entire regiment completely scattered after the drop, he led a hodgepodge unit in holding the positions at Biazzo Ridge and Piano Lupo, stopping German tanks with whatever portable anti-tank weapons they had, despite being wounded.²⁷⁵

Sicily proved to be the first of many tough campaigns in Italy for the Allies, coming to an end on August 17, 1943. Before surrendering in large numbers, Italians fought in the first days of Operation Husky even imperiling the entire American beachhead at Gela. Despite this, Italian-American servicemen and the greatest majority of all their American comrades-in-arms never developed a hate for the Italian humble private.²⁷⁶ In fact, the U.S. Army often selected Italian-speaking veterans of the Sicilian and Italian campaigns like Cpl. Samuel Buretta or 1st Lt. Theodore F. Bottinelli to become prison guards for the camps of Italian POWs that were being set up in the United States in December 1942.²⁷⁷ Even though Italians were a presence as real enemies on the

²⁷³ Isadore Valenti, *Combat Medic*, 22-28.

²⁷⁴ Joseph J. Amoroso, interview by James Maloney.

²⁷⁵ Joseph V. DeMasi, interview by G. Kurt Piehler and Tara Liston.

²⁷⁶ The entire policy of the U.S. military on the island was reflective of a benign attitude towards the Italian soldiers and POWs, freeing the Italian prisoners of war who could prove that they were not filo-Fascists and were natives of the island, originally farmers or workingmen, see Flavio Giovanni Conti, *I Prigionieri Italiani negli Stati Uniti* (Bologna, Italy: Società Editrice Il Mulino, 2012), 24.

²⁷⁷ 1st Lieutenant Bottinelli was a veteran of Sicily, Salerno, and Monte Cassino when sent to the U.S. to supervise an Italian Service Unit (ISU). See Louis E. Keefer, *Italian Prisoners of War in America (1942-1946)*, 100-101.

battlefield in the first days of the invasion, it is hard to effectively find them in the memories of Italian-Americans veterans of the Sicilian campaign, as well as in the Italian-American press.²⁷⁸

Italian-Americans suffered the war duty of fighting against their own countrymen in a number of ways. Therefore in their memories, they made different attempts to reconcile an unpleasant reality in which Italians were their enemies with their desire to continue considering them fellow countrymen. In most cases, Italian enemy soldiers remained at the side of the picture, and Italian-Americans wanted to think to have fought almost exclusively against Germans in Sicily, as in the case of Robert Argentine.²⁷⁹ In other cases they received no mention at all, even though the machineguns that had kept Sgt. Isadore Valenti pinned on Licata's beach for hours were very likely Italian machineguns.²⁸⁰ Tech. Sgt (T/Sgt.) Edward LaPorta, instead, dealt with the issue by inventing a fictional history of the Italian participation in the war. He maintained, in fact, that, "Italy was never at war with the United States," and that, even before the armistice, there were two governments in Italy, one headed by the King and one by Mussolini. According to T/Sgt Edward LaPorta, already during the North African campaign in 1941-1942, the only Italian troops involved were not King's troops, but only Mussolini's troops, unwilling soldiers forced to fight as a result of threats made against their families. For Edward LaPorta, also for the same reasons, these Italian soldiers surrendered in droves when opposing the Allied armies.²⁸¹

²⁷⁸ Stefano Luconi, "Italian Americans and the Invasion of Sicily in World War II," 17.

²⁷⁹ Robert P. Argentine, interview by James M. Zanella.

²⁸⁰ Isadore Valenti, *Combat Medic*, 22-28.

²⁸¹ Edward LaPorta, interview by Deborah Rayson Bailey, PhD, Anne Chance, Leslye Joy Allen, 2007, Atlanta, GA., video interview, Georgia WWII Oral History Project, Atlanta, GA, accessed January 28, 2017,

After the initial fighting, however, the Italians ceased to be active opponents to the Allied advance on Sicily, and from then on the Germans became the main Axis enemy in Italy. The quick surrender of many Sicilian towns, along with the warm welcoming by Italians of the American and British troops, elicited enthusiasm from Italian-American newspapers.²⁸² Throughout, the Italian-American ethnic press emphasized the contribution of Italian-Americans to the Sicilian campaign and their gallantry on the field, partly in order to gain political leverage on the U.S. administration and convince it to use leniency in demanding Italian.²⁸³ Perhaps also as a result of these pressures, the United States and the Allies at last accepted terms of surrender that allowed Italy not only to continue to exist as an autonomous political entity but also to join the allied cause with active military forces. As the following chapter will show, Operation Husky came to be interpreted by Sicilians and Italians as a liberation, rather than an invasion by enemy forces, in good part because of the connection existing between the United States and Italy. Even more than Italian-Americans at home, the Italian-American soldiers stepping on the Italian soil personified the bond that existed between Italy and the U.S.A. and that resisted even in wartime.²⁸⁴

<https://mpb.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/1c7a6ac9-9f34-4605-8282-d1d968a5e158/edward-laporta-tech-sergeant-army/>.

²⁸² Stefano Luconi, "Italian Americans and the Invasion of Sicily in World War II," 7-8.

²⁸³ Stefano Luconi, "Italian Americans and the Invasion of Sicily in World War II," 16-17.

²⁸⁴ The Allied campaign in Sicily was also stained by war crimes perpetrated by American military personnel in at least two instances, grouped together in the "Biscari massacre": the execution of thirty-six POWs by men of the 180th Infantry Regiment / 45th Infantry Division under orders of Captain John T. Compton and the execution of thirty-seven Italian POWs by Sgt. Horace T. West of the same unit, on July 14, 1943. In both cases, however, specific reasons for murdering the prisoners were given, none of them including hate for Italians or accusations of being fascists. As the investigation report conducted on the war crime reported, West referred to the Italian POWs as "sons of bitches," without references to their nationality, their enemy status, or Fascism. Partial explanation for his behavior was attributed to the anger he still felt after witnessing the death of two American soldiers at the hands of the enemy some days before and to orders received from General George S. Patton (commander of the U.S. Seventh Army) to not make prisoners. Additionally, it is likely that the stress of combat of several days influenced his mental state. Cpt.

As a result, the Armistice in Italy on September 8, 1943 (declared one day before the next Allied major amphibious landing at Salerno) was perceived as a relief by Italian-Americans at home and on the frontline.²⁸⁵ The Italian-Americans of Jersey City, the *Jersey Journal* reported, were jubilant to learn of Italy's surrender, having relatives in Italy and sons in the Italian army.²⁸⁶ The reaction of Italians themselves proved more difficult to interpret. Many translated the move into a late moral redemption, while it was seen by others as a shameful change of sides in defeat that confirmed ancient stereotypes. Italy joining the Allied side – albeit not completely as a full ally, but only as co-belligerent – allowed full material support for the areas already conquered, but meant for the rest of the country prompt occupation by the German military forces, and an unclear and uncertain future for the Italian Armed Forces stationed in those areas. Some Italian-Americans had not avoided military service in Army, although aware it could mean being sent to Italy to fight Italians, precisely buying on the hope that Italy would surrender

Compton's defense, instead, justified the execution of the POWs on the grounds that they had not voluntarily surrendered after a particularly vicious fight. The justifications given for committing the murders of Italian POWs during the Biscari massacre are particularly informative, indicative of an absence of widespread hatred for the Italians by the average American GI. In this regard, a comparison with the killing of SS prison guards at the concentration camp of Dachau at the hands of men of the same division on April 29, 1945 is particularly telling. These, in fact, were committed as a result of uncontrollable feelings of hate for the German guards as Nazis. See: Fred L. Borch, "Lore of the Corps – War Crimes in Sicily: Sergeant West, Captain Compton, and the Murder of Prisoners of War in 1943," in Headquarters, Department of the Army, *The Army Lawyer* (March 2013), 1-6; Alex Kershaw and Fred Sanders, *The Liberator: One World War II Soldier's 500-Day Odyssey from the Beaches of Sicily to the Gates of Dachau* (New York, NY: Random House, 2012).

²⁸⁵ Stephen Puleo, *The Boston Italians*, 213; Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 178. The relatively mild conditions for surrender of Italy accepted by the Roosevelt administration, pressed in this direction by the Italian-American community, did not prevent a continued erosion of his consensus levels in the community. In 1944, the Italian-American community started lamenting that Italy's status of co-belligerent had not been upgraded yet to that of full ally, causing further declining in its support for FDR's last elections in 1944. The Democratic Party popularity among the Italian-American community suffered greatly from Roosevelt's mishandling of the several issues mentioned earlier. The party would not regain the full trust of the Italian-American community before 1948: see Stefano Luconi, WWII and Italian-American Voters, in Paola A. Sensi Isolani, and Anthony Julian Tamburri, eds., *Italian Americans*, 68-71; "Italy Proposed as Full Ally of U.S.," *Evening Post* (Charleston, SC), June 13, 1944; "Italo Americans Happy," *Morning Star* (Rockford, IL).

²⁸⁶ "Vivas Ring," *Jersey Journal*, September 9, 1943.

soon.²⁸⁷ Ignazio Bellafiore, bound to Salerno, was glad that Italy had pulled out of the war, because in this way he would not have to shoot at Italians (“but I would, if I had to,” he pointed out).²⁸⁸ Similarly, Robert Argentine was grateful to learn that Italy had surrendered, after a tough experience in Sicily and facing imminent return to battle.²⁸⁹ The OSS took the chance of the passage of Italy on the Allies’ side to recruit new agents, including Italian civilians and even Italian former military.²⁹⁰ For some, though, the Italian surrender was a negative event. Sgt. Domenic Melso, for example, believed that not even Italy’s desertion of the Axis side and its turn on the Allied cause could change his low opinion of Italians: “I called them two-faced, I found out later, and that’s the way it went.”²⁹¹

The Italian Armistice effectively removed the main obstacle to enthusiastic and emotionally unrestrained Italian-American participation in the war in Italy, because from this time on the only enemy to kill would be the Germans. The war in Italy, and ground combat in particular, continued to remain extremely tough, miserable, and bloody. All the while, Italian-Americans remained an ubiquitous presence in the American units that were slowly making their way the Italian peninsula. During Operation Avalanche, the landing at Salerno, Cpl. James Caminiti, from Cincinnati, Ohio, was a loader for an antitank gun mounted on a halftruck with the 36th Infantry Division. James Caminiti and his crew managed to destroy and scare away thirteen enemy tanks during the battle, and he earned a Silver Star for his actions. After the Allied breakout from Salerno in mid-

²⁸⁷ Peter L. Belmonte, *Italian Americans in World War II*, 100.

²⁸⁸ Ignazio Bellafiore, interview by Andrew Amari.

²⁸⁹ Robert P. Argentine, interview by James M. Zanella.

²⁹⁰ Max Corvo, *Max Corvo: OSS Italy 1942-1945*, 148-149.

²⁹¹ Domenic Melso, interview by Sandra Stewart Holyoak and Joseph Pante.

September, Sgt. Caminiti remained two-hundred days in combat, sleeping on the ground or on trucks and feeding on canned rations.²⁹² Ignazio Bellafigliore volunteered to deliver a message to the U.S. Rangers at Chiunzi Pass during the battle for Salerno's beachhead, and earned a Bronze Star for his actions.²⁹³ Although Anthony and Alfonso Brandolino survived the disastrous parachute drop on Avellino, fifteen miles behind enemy lines in support of Operation Avalanche, they soon lost contact with the members of their unit. They managed to regroup with a British patrol advancing from the Salerno beachhead, but soon thereafter remained cut off and were wounded during a mortar barrage, only to be captured by the Germans.²⁹⁴ During the same operation, paratrooper George G. R. Fontanesi, who was raised in Italy, was able to disguise himself as Italian civilian, pass unobserved past German sentries, and acquire food from the local Italian population.²⁹⁵

²⁹²JamesCaminiti, interview by Kathleene Lang. Harrison, OH, March 7, 2003, video interview, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington D.C., accessed January 28, 2017, <http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.15469/mv0001001.stream>.

²⁹³ Ignazio Bellafigliore, interview by Andrew Amari.

²⁹⁴ Anthony and Alfonso Brandolino survived the war in a POW camp in Poland, and were liberated by the Red Army in 1945; Gerard M. Devlin, *Paratrooper!*, 322-323.

²⁹⁵ 509 Parachute Infantry Association, 509 Geronimo, "George G. R. Fontanesi."

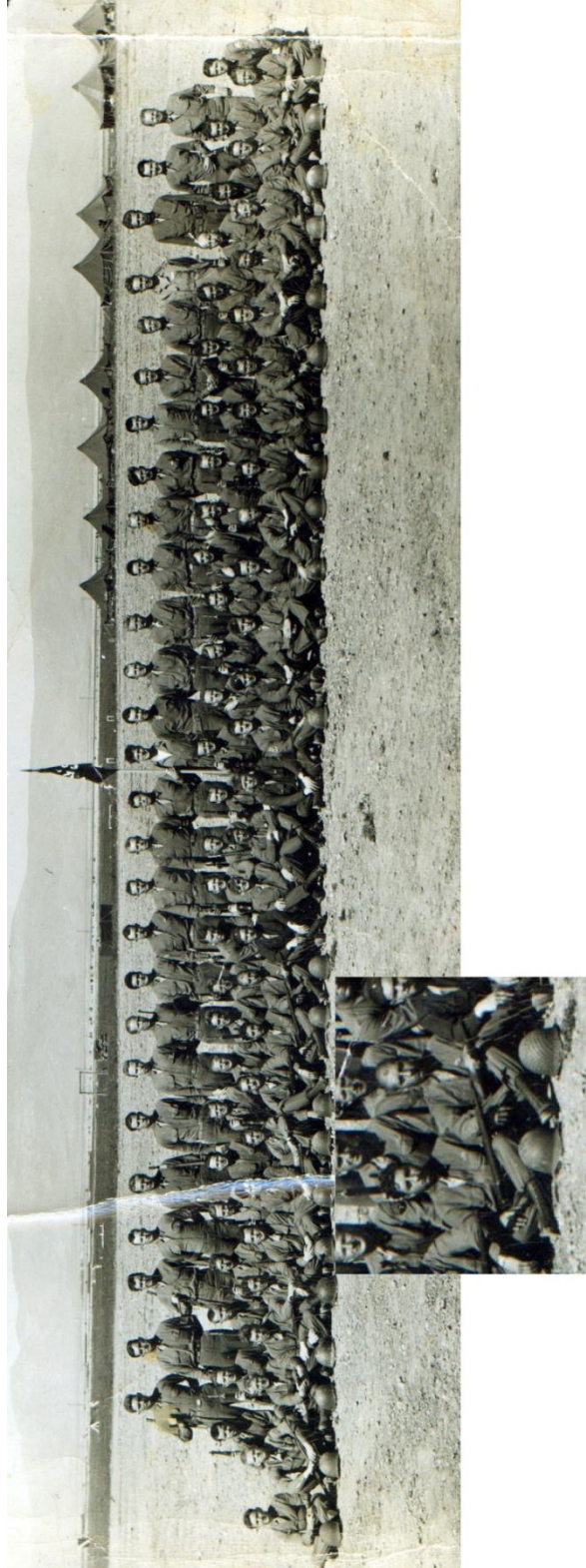


Figure 3. Photo of E Company, 2nd Battalion, 509th Parachute Infantry Regiment in Tunisia, 1943. Among them are Privates Anthony and Alfonso Brandolino.

Initially, Frank Mancuso thought the allied landing at Anzio and Nettuno in January 1944 (codenamed Operation Shingle) would be “like a piece of cake” because it was not immediately contested by the enemy. Soon after, however, the Allied forces found themselves bogged down in a stalemate under enemy artillery fire, with cold, rain, and mud that made it resemble the “swamps in New Orleans,” and that found a conclusion only four months later.²⁹⁶ Also landing at Anzio, Albert Onesti, took cover in a foxhole with his buddy Mike Narducci: “Mike, it’s impossible for us to go home.”²⁹⁷ Pfc. Albert DeFazio took part into one of the most intense actions of the war in Italy when his unit crossed the Gari river (often misidentified as the Rapido river) on small boats the night before the landings at Anzio, in front of fully aware Germans in fortified positions with machineguns and artillery. That night survived in his testimony as continuous streak of smoke, chaos, confusion, and death of comrades around him, including his “buddy.”²⁹⁸

The liberation of Rome, on June 4th, 1944, was seen as one of the highlights of the Italian campaign and caused euphoria among Italian-Americans but was soon overshadowed by Operation Overlord, the landings in Normandy, two days later.²⁹⁹ “Gary” Garibaldy summarized the Italian campaign as a whole as “the worst campaign that you could fight.” After Avalanche, he participated in the battles for breaking through the Winter Line at Cassino:

We dig in. Foxholes like rats...we’re overlooking on the other side of the mountain...that’s where the monastery was. Winter. Snow, rain, freezing. We didn’t shave; no haircuts. I was up there for close to forty-two days. We never

²⁹⁶ Frank Mancuso, interview by Tommy Lofton.

²⁹⁷ *5,000 Miles from Home* directed by Jim DiStasio, and Mark McCutcheon.

²⁹⁸ Albert DeFazio, Sr., interview by James M. Zanella.

²⁹⁹ “Italo-Americans Happy Over Rome’s Liberation,” *Boston Herald*, June 5, 1944.

took our clothes off... You had all to do to survive... Anybody there is out to kill you... They would put the wounded people on the mules like bags of potatoes... If you didn't die up there, got hit, the mule went over the mountain – you got killed because you were tied to the mule. A lot of men got killed that way... Christmas '43, my birthday. I'm in a hole with another guy... We were living like animals... Men get trench feet... I saw men in foxholes, shell-shocked... Unbelievable – the atrocity, agony of war.³⁰⁰

In a way, service in the Air Forces in Italy could be seen as a more detached and less traumatic form of combat than the service in the Army. By his own admission, Sgt. Emilio DiFilippo, “had no combat experience, thankfully,” while serving as part of the ground crew with the Air Forces in Sardinia from 1944, and later in Leghorn. After joining the National Guard before the war, Emilio DiFilippo was deeply unsatisfied with the situation of stasis and uncertainty created by the outbreak of the war for the United States. Thinking it would be exciting, he then joined the Army Air Forces, undertaking training as a fighter pilot in Kelly Field, Texas, but being redirected to serve in the ground crew. Sgt. Emilio DiFilippo ended up as part of a malaria detail of radio company within a fighter control outfit, and his job, away from the frontlines, consisted of verifying malaria-infested areas and to then request chemical treatment. Aside from malaria-carrying mosquitoes, Emilio DiFilippo stated, “there was no danger that I knew of.”³⁰¹ Carlo Ginobile participated to thirty-six bombing missions as a tail gunner on a “Liberator” bomber with the 541st Air Wing based in Gioia Del Colle, San Pancrazio Salentino, and lastly Foggia, in Apulia. Unlike the Army “dogfaces” like “Gary” Garibaldi, living miserable lives on the mountains of Italy, the life for bomber crews at the Air Forces bases was quite good, with daily mail deliveries, hot food, entertainment

³⁰⁰ Anthony V. Riccio, *The Italian American Experience in New Haven*, 305-306.

³⁰¹ Emilio DiFilippo, interview by Nicholas Ciotola.

services and movies, and stove-heated tents.³⁰² Luckily for airmen of Italian origins, most bombing missions by the Fifteenth Air Force were directed at objectives located in Germany, Austria, and Romania, and only a minority were on Italian territory.³⁰³ Frank Bartolomei, from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, was raised by Italian parents from Pistoia, in central Italy. He detested the idea of bombing Italy to the point that he avoided taking part in bombing runs on Italian soil.³⁰⁴

On a typical day, Carlo Ginobile, would get up in the morning, have breakfast, take care of his needs, attend a briefing, put his flight gear on, and then go on a mission, leaving at 7:00 or 8:00 in the morning, and then coming back by 3:00 or 5:00 in the afternoon. After every mission, doughnuts and coffee would await them back at the base. On average, Carlo Ginobile and his crew would be assigned a daily mission for three or four days in a row, then resting the for the remaining part of the week. On and off the plane, the enlisted men and the officers of the crew enjoyed a very relaxed relationship, drinking next to each other at the base club. “Deg” (Ginobile was too difficult to pronounce for the rest of the crew) flew the tour-of-duty requirement of fifty missions by July 3, 1944, but in actuality, they were only thirty-six: those bombing runs exceeding a radius of five-hundred miles were counted by the military as two.³⁰⁵

In reality, however, the experience of Air Forces crewmen in Italy was far from being an easy experience. Isolated from the rest of the crew in a Plexiglas bubble and at thousands of feet of altitude in arctic temperature, Carlo Ginobile would operate his machineguns against enemy planes while wearing his uniform, an electrically heated suit

³⁰² Carlo J. Ginobile, interview by Sandra Stewart Holyoak and Jeneann Robinson

³⁰³ Carlo J. Ginobile, interview by Sandra Stewart Holyoak and Jeneann Robinson.

³⁰⁴ Istituto Storico della Resistenza in Toscana, “War and Ethnicity.”

³⁰⁵ Carlo J. Ginobile, interview by Sandra Stewart Holyoak and Jeneann Robinson.

(“which hardly ever worked,” or heated too much), a flotation device, a flak vest, goggles, a steel helmet, a headset with throat microphone, an oxygen mask and, eventually, a parachute harness. Meanwhile, the enemy flak threatened to riddle them with little holes, killing them directly, or destroying the plane. These were the reasons why the U.S. military tried to make the life of crewmen at the base so livable:

You had to be in good physical condition in order to stand a flight. The flight was grueling although it didn’t seem like it. You had tension, constantly, from takeoff to landing, not only the tension, be the elements, the air was so cold up there and...after our flights, the war practically left us; we didn’t know it, but the stress was building up in our bodies; the stress was taking its toll.³⁰⁶

On his last mission as turretgunner on May 26, 1944, Sgt. “Bill” Lanza’s B-25 was shot down by the enemy flak over the skies of Arezzo, Tuscany.³⁰⁷ His plane was part of the 446th Bomb Squadron, 321st Bomb Group, based in Solenzara, Corsica, and was conducting bombing raids on infrastructure as part of the aerial offensive “Operation Strangle” to support the Army’s breakthroughs at Anzio and Cassino. Major William Clark Hunter continued to fly the aircraft until his death, and by doing so gave time enough to the rest of the crew to bail out. While some made it back to friendly lines, and others were captured by German and RSI patrols, Sgt. “Bill” Lanza and T/Sgt. Alfred J. Todd had to escape and hide for sixty-five days deep in enemy territory, surviving only thanks to the help from local population.³⁰⁸ Fred Nuzzo, tail gunner from New Haven, Connecticut, barely survived a crash landing on a bomber that had been hit by German anti-aircraft at the very end of the war.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁶ Carlo J. Ginobile, interview by Sandra Stewart Holyoak and Jeneann Robinson.

³⁰⁷ John W. Lanza, *Shot Down Over Italy*, 104.

³⁰⁸ John W. Lanza, *Shot Down Over Italy*, 129-138.

³⁰⁹ Anthony V. Riccio, *The Italian American Experience in New Haven*, 312-314.

Italian-American agents continued to take part in OSS secret missions for sabotage, collection of intelligence, or in support of the resistance deep in the occupied zones of northern Italy. In this regard, Italian-American agents came in contact with Italian military personnel of the RSI after September 1943. Cpl. Rosario “Saddo” F. Squatrito, of Staten Island, New York, along with fifteen other intelligence agents, mostly of Italian-American origin, belonging to the 2671st OSS Special Reconnaissance Battalion was captured by German and Italian troops. After a tense interrogation, during which 1st Lt. Vincent Russo’s Italian interrogator accused him of being a traitor due to his Genoese heritage, the “Donovan’s Devils” were executed by their German captors on March 23, 1944.³¹⁰

For historian Salvatore LaGumina, Italian-Americans constituted “a major element in the ranks of unsung heroes of the war.”³¹¹ Italian-American pressure groups, though, interested in proving their community’s loyalty to the U.S.A. and bravery, made certain that to English-language national newspapers carried only the most brilliant stories of courage in war by Italian-Americans, leaving the actions of everyday heroism in the local, Italian-language newspapers.³¹² As a result, if names like John Basilone, Lou Zamperini, and Don Gentile became known to the American nation, others like 1st Lt. Frank Fuoto or Vincent Puglise did not. Yet, Frank Fuoto, very proud of his Campanian origins, had a primary role in the capture of San Vittore, during the Volturno River

³¹⁰ Joseph Squatrito, *Code Name Ginny: A Hero’s Story* (Staten Island, NY: Forever Free, 2001), 159-169.

³¹¹ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 267.

³¹² Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 180-188, 274.

campaign, while Vincent Puglise earned a Distinguished Flying Cross and an Air Medal as navigator in a bomber crew with over fifty missions also over Italy.³¹³

After the Italian Armistice, although service with the Army and the Air Forces in Italy continued to be dangerous, it did not prove to be intrinsically different for Italian-American servicemen there than for servicemen of all other ethnicities. Although the RSI in northern Italy formally continued its war against the Allies, actual encounters between its military personnel and American troops – Italian-Americans among them – remained rare. For the Italian-American servicemen, the war in Italy after Italians ceased to be the enemy proved to be a horrifying experience. Their combat experiences, however, were not largely different from those of all their other American comrades and they merged together, in a common memory of a mostly forgotten front.

Participation in the war, and in particular in the war in Italy, represented Italian-American loyalty's trial by fire, and constituted a turning point in the history of Italian-Americans especially because they proved ready to sacrifice their lives in fighting the enemies of the United States, even if it could mean fighting against their fellow countrymen. Once this risk vanished, the aspects of combat in the Italian campaign for Italian-American servicemen became closely similar to those of all the other Americans. Combat, however, did not constitute the entirety of these servicemen's experience of the war in Italy. In all those instances in which they were not immediately on the frontline described in the next chapter, like relating with the local Italian population or visiting Italian cities, the war in Italy came was once again a special kind of war for Italian-American servicemen

³¹³ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 277-280.

CHAPTER V – *QUANDO TACE LA BATTAGLIA*: NON-COMBAT EXPERIENCES OF ITALIAN-AMERICAN SERVICEMEN IN ITALY

Although life on the frontlines in Italy for Italian-American servicemen was certainly brutal and tough, as the campaigns in France, Belgium, Germany, and the islands of the Pacific, so it also proved for their American comrades of all other origins. With the notable exception of the early phases of Operation Husky, in which the possibility for Italian-American servicemen to fight fellow Italians, friends, and even relatives was real, combat experiences in Italy did not prove exceptionally different from those of all their American servicemen. Simply put, answering to German rifle fire while taking cover in a sangar on “Point 445” on the mountains surrounding Monte Cassino, had no difference from doing it from a foxhole in the Ardennes forest in Belgium or a ditch in Normandy.

Combat, however, be it from the foxholes or from the cockpit of a bomber, represented only a portion, although traumatic, of the experience of the war in Italy for Italian-Americans in uniform. As their testimonies confirm, during the process of transfer to the frontlines, when pulled out from frontline duty, when operating in conditions of non-immediate danger, when given periods of rest and recuperation to the rear, or when given leaves, troops focused on matters other than simple survival. In all these situations, American Army, Air Force, Navy, and Coast Guard personnel moved around, and, in doing that, saw the country they were serving in, entering into contact with the Italian local population and Italian culture. In short, they truly interacted with the Italian country, its inhabitants, and its culture. Italian-American servicemen, however, because of their origins, related to the Italian theater of war, in a way that was impossible for Polish-

American, German-American, Irish-American, or Scandinavian-Americans. Even after years of effort at playing down their Italian identities to achieve assimilation in the United States, the Italian roots of Italian-American servicemen reemerged again when serving in Italy. This happened not in the heat of the battle, but in all the remaining moments of their military service in Italy, in a variety of situations that resulted in the feeling of a deep connection with the inhabitants, the language with its dialects, the land, and its culture.

As the previous chapter showed, the large-scale presence of Italian-Americans not only in the United States but also in the first line of the U.S. Armed Forces, influenced American perception of the war against Italy and the actions of the American government.³¹⁴ Italians were never totally seen as the enemy, and the Roosevelt administration was forced to use care in managing the war in Italy to not alienate the politically important Italian section of the American population. Furthermore, Italian-Americans, both in the civilian world and the military, directly contributed to the success of the Italian campaign as it was underway (and even before it started), in a variety of ways. The willingness of Italians to continue the war in 1943, already feeble to start with, was further weakened by their awareness of the connection with the United States through the presence of many immigrant relatives and friends there. Additionally, numerous broadcasts and appeals by influential and internationally renowned Italian-

³¹⁴ Harry Coles and Albert K. Weinberg, *United States Army in World War II, Special Studies, Civil Affairs: Soldiers Become Governors* (Washington DC: Center for Military History, United States Army, 1992), 166-167.

Americans like Fiorello LaGuardia and Charles L. Poletti, popular overseas, also facilitated Italy's surrender.³¹⁵

More specifically, the American military command realized that there was no need to expect an hostile reaction to the military occupation administrations of the conquered areas, and the first experience of Sicily confirmed this.³¹⁶ One of the reasons for this was that American troops were not seen as foreign invaders, but instead often through the friendly faces of fellow Italians. Some Sicilians, like Michael Gagliano or "Tony" Siciliano, the uncle of Rocco C. Siciliano, welcomed the arriving American soldiers, because they themselves were former immigrants who had fought in World War I in American uniform before returning to the island.³¹⁷ The mutual perception of American invaders and Italians as friends, instead of enemies, was symbolized by the character of the Italian-American Maj. Victor Joppolo in the 1944 novel, made into a movie the following year, *A Bell for Adano*.³¹⁸ The novel took inspiration from the real story of 3rd Infantry Division's Maj. Frank E. Toscani, sent to the Sicilian harbor of Licata as military governor because of his Italian-speaking ability and his knowledge of Italian customs.³¹⁹ Toscani, like Victor Joppolo in the novel and in the movie, helped the inhabitants of the town obtain a new bell for their church after the Fascists had taken it down to melt it and manufacture weapons. For Maj. Frank Toscani, "being Italian, it was natural for me to treat my people sympathetically," and because of his roots he could

³¹⁵ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 172-173; Stefano Luconi, "Italian Americans and the Invasion of Sicily in World War II," 9.

³¹⁶ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 224.

³¹⁷ Gary L. Mormino, ed., *The Impact of World War II on Italian-Americans*, 86-87; Rocco C. Siciliano, *Walking on Sand*, 92.

³¹⁸ John Hersey, *A Bell for Adano* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1944); *A Bell for Adano*, directed by Henry King, DVD (Hollywood Classics, 2011).

³¹⁹ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 159-160; Marquis Child, "Washington Calling," *Richmond Times Dispatch* (Richmond, VA.), March 6, 1945.

fully understand the importance of the church bell for the daily and religious life of Italians.³²⁰

Maj. Frank Toscani was not the only Italian-American officer tasked with the duty of managing the local military administration of Italy's Allied-occupied areas. Historian Salvatore LaGumina explains how the Italian roots, at the base of their choice for these assignments by the U.S. military, also resulted in friendly relationships with the local populations.³²¹ In wartime occupied Italy, Italian-Americans and native Italians fundamentally saw each other as fellow Italians. 1st Lt. Max Corvo and Maj. Orpheus J. Bizzozero, the Public Health Officer of Sicily's AMGOT, bonded in close friendship not only because they hailed from the same Connecticut area but also because they shared common family roots from the Italian island. Together they made their objective to "collaborate in the programs to better the lot of the people of Sicily who were lacking almost all necessities of life."³²²

For the AMGOT's officials, often of Italian-American extraction, a central concern was not simply orderly administering Italian areas under their control after the Allied conquest but also effectively to proceed in the reconstruction and the material support of the population. 1st Lt. Daniel Petruzzi received the new assignment as staff of the AMGOT in North Africa, before being shipped to Sicily, and his superior Maj. Hannibal N. Fiore discussed it, expressing his hope that "we should be able to some real good four our country. And for Italy too... We're going to put those Fascists where they

³²⁰ Douglas Martin, "F. E. Toscani, 89, Dies; Model for Hero of 'Bell for Adano,'" *New York Times* (New York City, NY), January 28, 2001, accessed January 11, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/01/28/nyregion/fe-toscani-89-dies-model-for-hero-of-bell-for-adano.html>.

³²¹ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 221-228.

³²² Max Corvo, *Max Corvo: OSS Italy 1942-1945*, 71-72.

belong, but we also ought to be able to help some of these poor innocent Italians get rehabilitated in a free and democratic society.”³²³

After following a Civil Affairs team through Sicily, from Licata to Palermo, always relating to the local Italian population and, especially, influential local exponents, 1st Lt. Daniel Petruzzi was transferred to Naples, where he became the “Baby Governor” of Naples.³²⁴ The popularity of Petruzzi as Allied Military Governor (AMG) of the city due to his Italian ethnicity, which ensured a friendly reception of the occupation forces, could, however, also had a negative impact on his duties. Petruzzi’s tasks as AMG in fact were not only those of providing for the population but also resolving civilian disputes and removing former Fascists from positions of power. An efficient accomplishment of these objectives was made more difficult for him when Italians appealed to his Italian origins, and tried to exploit them to their advantage. Therefore, in many instances he made an effort to negate any connection with Italy and maintain a detached attitude that prevented use of familiarity by Italian petitioners.³²⁵

The United States prepared for the reconstruction of the conquered areas in Italy even before the start of the first actual campaign in Sicily.³²⁶ Italian-American pressure on the Roosevelt administration for mild terms of surrender for Italy first, and for the allotment of massive funding for the military reconstruction of Sicily and Italy later, continued to be a constant feature in the American press during the war, and after.³²⁷ The British never expressed the same type of concerns over Italy’s reconstruction, in part

³²³ Daniel J. Petruzzi, *My War Against the Land of My Ancestors*, 74.

³²⁴ Daniel J. Petruzzi, *My War Against the Land of My Ancestors*, 106.

³²⁵ Daniel J. Petruzzi, *My War Against the Land of My Ancestors*, 108-110.

³²⁶ Harry Coles and Albert K. Weinberg, *United States Army in World War II, Special Studies, Civil Affairs*, 179-185.

³²⁷ Stefano Luconi, “Italian Americans and the Invasion of Sicily in World War II,” 10-12, 18. Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 230-232.

because the population of Italian origins in the United Kingdom and in the Commonwealth was not substantial, and incomparably smaller than that of the United States.³²⁸

Less than a year after the end of the Casablanca Conference, Italy surrendered at conditions much different from those of the unconditional surrender demanded by Roosevelt of the Axis countries. In fact, in addition to retaining its political integrity and its monarchy, Italy joined the Allied side as co-belligerent, reconstituting its Armed Forces in the Italian Co-belligerent Army or Italian Liberation Corps. On this matter, the *Progresso Italo-Americano*, the most influential Italian-American newspaper, maintained that, “American military men – particularly those Italian extraction – should be drawn...into commissions helping to reorganize Italy’s Armed Forces on a more effective and democratic basis.”³²⁹ Although the suggestions of the Italian newspaper were not adopted in official military directives and the American involvement in the reconstitution of Italy’s army remained limited, common unofficial practices in the Italian theater of war often reflected them by assigning the role of Liaison Officers to Italian-Americans. Italian-American servicemen, as Italians, but also as Americans at the same time, were points of contact between two national identities and cultures, and therefore the most indicated to interact with Italian civilians and military personnel.

After his assignment as military governor of Naples, 1st Lt. Daniel Petruzzi was attached to the 36th Infantry Division’s Headquarters along the Gustav Line. His job was that of providing a connection with the Liaison Officer of the Italian Co-belligerent Army Cpt. Flavio Legamento of the Regia Aeronautica, the reconstituted Italian air force.

³²⁸ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 223-224.

³²⁹ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 229.

Although the official reasons for this assignment for Daniel Petruzzi were his Italian language speaking ability, a translator was in reality not necessary, because Cpt. Flavio Legamento was perfectly able to speak English.³³⁰ The choice of Italian-Americans to maintain relationships with the newly established Italian Armed Forces, as the case of Daniel Petruzzi suggests, went beyond simple practical reasons of language but was necessary to foster mutual trust and acceptance between the American and the Italian military. However, not only the rest of the 36th ID HQ staff generally treated Flavio Legamento harshly, but also anti-Italian prejudice and resentment reemerged when an American captain vaguely accused him of being a “traitor,” a “wop,” and an undercover Fascist.³³¹ For 1st Lt. Daniel Petruzzi, identification with Italians in a common Italian identity, useful to foster unity, proved to be a double-edged knife when this was interpreted as a sign of disloyalty toward the American side.

After Italy’s surrender, Max Corvo and the OSS extensively sought the collaboration of the former Italian military intelligence, the Servizio Informazioni Militari (SIM) with the Italian SI Section. Although Aldo Icardi considered using great caution in dealing with the SIM, because of the possibility of the presence of double-crossing Fascist traitors, the collaboration was continued because it could pay high dividends.³³² In fact, not only could their help be useful in winning the war against the RSI and German forces occupying Italy, but the information the SIM still retained on its former Japanese ally could help the Allies to win even the war in the Pacific.³³³

³³⁰ Daniel J. Petruzzi, *My War Against the Land of My Ancestors*, 153-154.

³³¹ Daniel J. Petruzzi, *My War Against the Land of My Ancestors*, 155-156.

³³² Aldo Icardi, *American Master Spy: A True Story* (New York, NY: University Books, Inc., 1954), 13.

³³³ Max Corvo, *Max Corvo: OSS Italy 1942-1945*, 229.

Good relationships between Italian-American servicemen and personnel of the Italian Co-belligerent Army and civilian workers hired by the U.S. military are one of the most recurrent features of the testimonies of Italian-American veterans. The benevolence and friendliness existing between these Italians, former enemies, and Italian-American servicemen was the result of the mutual recognition of being all Italian nationals. In turn, Italian-Americans constituted such a large portion of the American military and American society, that the perception of the existence of a human connection was reflected also in the relationship between Italians and Americans. After the Armistice, the OSS put into action the plans to recruit agents among former Italian soldiers and officers, while American soldiers oftentimes collaborated with Italian soldiers of the Italian Liberation Corps.³³⁴ Bruno Ghiringhelli, for example, an American “mountaineer” in the 10th Mountain Division had a good relationship with the *Alpini*, the Italian alpine troops, and their mules that in some cases supported Allied troops on the line by carrying supplies.³³⁵ Ignazio Bellafiore, complaining about the muddy weather of 1943 Italy had no problems in joking with an Italian lieutenant. that “Mussolini was ready to fight the war on the highways, but wasn’t ready for this mud.”³³⁶

Italian-American servicemen were sometimes assigned the task of supervising the work of hired Italian workers, civilians or former members of the Armed Forces. Mario Iafolla, “the boss of the pier” in Naples, was inarguably chosen for this duty because of his role as Chief Storekeeper in the U.S. Navy and because of his ability to speak Italian,

³³⁴ Max Corvo, *Max Corvo: OSS Italy 1942-1945*, 148-149.

³³⁵ Bruno Ghiringhelli, interview by Dominic Rios.

³³⁶ Ignazio Bellafiore, interview by Andrew Amari.

which led him to act as interpreter of the base.³³⁷ In the case of Sgt. James R. Apato from Chicago, however, only his Italian roots dictated the choice of putting him in charge of a group of Italian laborers tasked with repairing the tracks of a rail station in Sicily. Despite his inability to speak the Italian language, he was deemed by his superior officer as “the best we’ve got” among all the others, likely because his Italian origins predisposed him better than anyone else to deal with the Italian workers.³³⁸ Relating the experience of 1st Lt. Philip Manganaro, of Montclair, New Jersey, historian Gary Mormino notes that his Italian background and Italian-speaking ability allowed him to translate his superior’s orders of repairing a shop to the Italian workers with “enough diplomacy and sensitivity as to get the job done smoothly and quickly.”³³⁹

An analysis of the testimonies of the Italian civilians or former soldiers that collaborated with the American military in Italy in wartime confirms this atmosphere of friendly relationships with American troops, but in particular with Italian-American servicemen due to matters of common national origins. Eighteen-year-old Gian Carlo Stracciari, from Argelato, Bologna, in central Italy, was pressed into service in the Esercito Nazionale Repubblicano, the army of the RSI in 1943. Not long after, he deserted and managed to find employment at a U.S. Army’s Ordnance Ammunition Company, where he called all the American soldiers there “*paesan*.” The use of the term (meaning “fellow citizen” in Italian southern dialects) was possibly started first by Italian-Americans in Sicily, but quickly spread and became very common to all

³³⁷ Mario Iafolla, interview by Nicholas Ciotola.

³³⁸ Sgt. James R. Apato was drafted in May 1942 and, trained as medical technician, served for forty-one months in the war in four different armies, first in Algeria and Tunisia with the British First Army in Algeria and Tunisia, and later, in Sicily and Italy with the American Seventh and Fifth Armies. During his service he fought in nine campaigns and was wounded twice. See Linda Grisolia, “Man of the Hour,” *Fra Noi*, October 2005.

³³⁹ Gary L. Mormino, ed., *The Impact of World War II on Italian-Americans*, 87.

Americans. The term, indicative of a connection between Italian-Americans and Italians based on the concept of a common nationality, therefore broadened to include all Americans of all the other ethnicities but to no other foreigners. Gian Carlo Stracciari, in fact, pointed out that, “However, I would never dare to call a British soldier with this term.”³⁴⁰

Because of the hard work at the Ordnance Company, Gian Carlo Stracciari and his companions Gastone, Fonsino, and Marcantelli left, and went to work at the 15th Evacuation Hospital. There, they became friends with a number of American soldiers, but especially with Galassi, an Italian-American soldier of Neapolitan origins. The friendship with him, on the basis of national common roots, translated into full complicity even when they were accused of stealing equipment from the hospital and breaking military regulations. After being reprimanded by the commanding officer, Galassi, in fact, told them in Neapolitan dialect: “*Guagliò* (a dialectalism for ‘boys’), this is the moral of the story: you can steal as much as you want, but don’t get caught.”³⁴¹ Similarly, Luigi Vasco Salsi and his friend Bruno, escaping from German-occupied territory were picked up and fully integrated as unofficial helpers in the 974th Field Artillery Battalion only after the intercession of the many Italian-American artillerymen of the unit.³⁴²

An episode from the testimony of PO3 William Grieco not only offers an account of his service in the fourth branch of the U.S. Armed Forces, the Coast Guard but also provides a similar narrative of a strong bond between Italian-Americans and Italians

³⁴⁰ Gian Carlo Stracciari, *Diary of Gian Carlo Stracciari, 1943 – 1945*. Transcript (Pieve Santo Stefano, AR, Italy: Archivio Diaristico Nazionale), 87.

³⁴¹ Gian Carlo Stracciari, *Diary of Gian Carlo Stracciari, 1943 – 1945*. Transcript, 124.

³⁴² Salsi, Luigi Vasco, *Diary of Luigi Vasco Salsi, 1943 – 1945*. Transcript (Pieve Santo Stefano, AR, Italy: Archivio Diaristico Nazionale), 30-35.

stemming from common national origins. Wanting to become a photographer, Grieco drifted away from the U.S. Navy and signed up for the Coast Guard right after Pearl Harbor and was accepted in October 1942. Although PO3 William Grieco never became a photographer, he travelled several times to Mediterranean. In Naples, he noticed the Italian dock workers taking an extremely long time to load the supplies, and Grieco, who could speak the language, was assigned the task of checking what the holdup was. With no qualms, the Italian workers explained to him that were purposely dragging their feet, so that they could stay at the service of the U.S. military for a longer time, receive pay for more work-days, and enjoy good meals.³⁴³ The commonality of origins, strengthened by Grieco's capability of communicating in the native language, created a situation of complicity with the Italian workers in full transgression of military regulations. Grieco never reported it, even if it happened multiple times.

Italian-American servicemen often experienced friendly encounters not only with Italian civilians or deserters clearly not on the Axis side but also surprisingly even with POWs, due to a common Italian national bond that shook every conventionality of enemy designation. Speaking Italian with Italian prisoners was, for example, a common occurrence for Staff Sgt. Frank P. Brancato, from Hartford, Connecticut, serving in a medical detachment attached to an artillery regiment in Italy.³⁴⁴ The familiarity and friendliness displayed by these Italian POWs in some cases could give origin to situations that bordered on the absurd. Pfc. Joseph F. Barone of Rochester, New York, even had to remind the Italian soldiers he was conversing with that they could not come out with him,

³⁴³ William D. Grieco, interview by James M. Zanella.

³⁴⁴ Frank Paul Brancato, interview by Tom Cox, February 23, 2016, Sequim, WA., video interview, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington D.C., accessed January 28, 2017, <http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.64678/mv0001001.stream>.

because “you’re my prisoners.”³⁴⁵ Serving in 1945 in central and northern Italy against Germans and RSI forces, Bruno Ghiringhelli met some Italian POWs who he described as “pretty good people.”³⁴⁶ Whenever they surrendered, Ghiringhelli recalled that they always proved very friendly, and always insisted in giving their American captors their traditional Italian *salame* (a type of cured sausage of dried meat), and “especially when they knew you were Italian they made a big deal out of it.”³⁴⁷

Except for Domenic Melso, who refrained from talking to those who considered almost not true Italians anymore, relationships between Americans, and especially Italian-American servicemen, and Italian POWs were mostly characterized by friendliness.³⁴⁸ Sgt. Isadore Valenti, for example, reported being called “comrade” (“*paisà*”) by Italian prisoners and having generally a good relationship with them. In one instance, an Italian sergeant he was talking with in Italian was amazed at finding out that he and Valenti came from the same northern Italian city.³⁴⁹ The sympathy between Italian-American servicemen and their Italian prisoners, deriving from a commonality of origins and a national bond, even spread among the rest of the American forces. As seen, such feelings of connection with the Italians were strong enough as to break through their technical designation as enemies or prisoners of war. In the exceptional case of Sgt. Cucchi, no technical designation of prisoner-of-war could prevent him from nearly

³⁴⁵ Joseph Frank Barone, interview by Peter Barone and Anna Raskin, December 21, 2009, Blue Bell, PA., audio interview, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington D.C., accessed January 28, 2017, <http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.72610/sr0001001.stream>.

³⁴⁶ Bruno Ghiringhelli, interview by Dominic Rios.

³⁴⁷ Bruno Ghiringhelli, interview by Dominic Rios.

³⁴⁸ See Chapter 3, INSERT PAGE#.

³⁴⁹ Isadore Valenti, interview by James M. Zanella.

bursting in joy upon meeting his own brother, who had been drafted in the Italian Army right before the war and captured by the Americans.³⁵⁰

Furthermore, this situation of unity and friendliness between Italian-Americans and Italians despite the state of war between the United States and Italy happened not only in regards to Italian-American and Italian POWs but also when Italians were the captors. Sgt. Edward LaPorta, among many others, fell prisoner to German forces during the Battle for Kasserine Pass in February 1943 in Tunisia and spent six months in a prison camp in Reggio Calabria, southern Italy, before being transferred to Germany. As Edward LaPorta reveals, given the difficult conditions at the camp, he would have never survived without the help of Italian civilians and even soldiers, to whom he spoke in Italian and secretly brought him food.³⁵¹ Cpl. Alfredo J. Bernacchi, automatic rifle gunner in the 179th Infantry Regiment, 45th ID, was also captured in May 1944 but explained that “Italians, of course, always treated me well because I spoke the language and I could sympathize with them.”³⁵²

The experiences of Italian-American servicemen in Italy are, most of all, dotted with friendly encounters with the native population that constantly exemplified the irresistible bond of nationhood and Italian identity between them and Italians. Cpl. Anthony Costanzo simply found them to be “more kind than most people...they have big hearts and are sincere.”³⁵³ Robert Argentine, serving with the 45th ID in Italy until the unit left to participate to “Operation Dragoon” in southern France in August 1944,

³⁵⁰ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 238.

³⁵¹ Edward LaPorta, interview by Deborah Rayson Bailey, PhD, Anne Chance, Leslye Joy Allen.

³⁵² Alfredo J. Bernacchi, interview by Sarwat Khan, February 26, 2007, Chicago, IL., video interview, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington D.C., accessed January 28, 2017, <http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.01792/sr0001001.stream>.

³⁵³ Anthony Costanzo, interview by the author and Steve Massa.

actively sought contact with local civilians, and aware of their poor conditions, always tried to give them all the help he could. Perhaps sympathized with them especially because he had relatives in Italy close to Salerno whom he tried, unsuccessfully, to go visit.³⁵⁴ “Fred” Bernacchi felt particularly close to the Italian population because, as an Italian-American, he “was like an in-betweenner with them.”³⁵⁵ Mario Iafolla, working as pier supervisor in Naples, was able to observe the city and its inhabitants, an environment in which he wanted “soak it all in.”³⁵⁶ Bruno Ghiringhelli, also sought contact with the Italian population during his week away from combat at a Fifth Army rest center in Florence.³⁵⁷ Pfc. Nick Scardina, drafted in November 1944, served almost exclusively in the rear as a mechanic in Naples, Caserta, and in northern Italy. Scardina felt really close to the destitute Italian population and tried to help them as he could, and similarly also did Monteleone.³⁵⁸ Sgt. Isadore Valenti often times met locals in Italy, and summarized the time he spent in each of those occasions as “the best time we had” since his arrival overseas.³⁵⁹

The interactions between Italian-American and Italians, based on the mutual acknowledgement of sharing a common Italian identity, in particular found their expression in some points of contact. These, in turn, were some of the most characteristic elements of the Italian identity that second generation Italian-Americans had assimilated growing up in Italian families and the Italian-American communities: language, food, and religion.

³⁵⁴ Robert P. Argentine, interview by James M. Zanella.

³⁵⁵ Alfredo J. Bernacchi, interview by Sarwat Khan.

³⁵⁶ Mario Iafolla, interview by Nicholas Ciotola.

³⁵⁷ Bruno Ghiringhelli, interview by Dominic Rios.

³⁵⁸ *5,000 Miles from Home* directed by Jim DiStasio and Mark McCutcheon.

³⁵⁹ Isadore Valenti, *Combat Medic*, 37.

Italian language was the factor that, more than any other, was unifying for Italian-Americans and Italians, because seen as the ultimate evidence of Italian identity and affinity to the Italian nation. In particular, the ability to speak Italian, despite the differences of the dialect spoken, was, for these servicemen, the basic condition for the establishment of good relationships with Italian civilians. 1st Lt. Corvo and the other agents of the OSS Italian SI Section, as well as the Italian-American members of the AMGOT, were aware of the importance of speaking the same language of the Sicilian population in order to be accepted by them. As a result, they tried to speak the Sicilian dialect to be recognized as fellow Italians and fellow Sicilians, and overcome the sentiments of diffidence produced by the American uniforms they were wearing.³⁶⁰ Likewise, in the experiences of Giuseppe Rossolino and Santo Vincenzo Rossolino, uncles of historian Richard Gambino, indicate that only the sound of the familiar Sicilian dialect they spoke was able to win over the puzzlement and the terror felt by the Sicilians at the sight of their foreign uniforms.³⁶¹

After the liberation of Rome, CIC agent “Al” Gallo was given the task of disarming the many partisan formations in the territories already under occupation so as to prevent the presence of large groups of armed individuals in the allied-occupied areas. Often times, however, he was assigned the duty of welcoming and taking to safety Italian refugees escaping from the German-controlled areas because of his ability to speak Italian, almost without an accent. This was not only functional in earning the trust of the

³⁶⁰ Max Corvo, *Max Corvo: OSS Italy 1942-1945*, 70-78.

³⁶¹ Richard Gambino, *Blood of My Blood*, 285-287.

Italian civilians but also in identifying eventual German deserters trying to escape the Allied authorities.³⁶²

Cpl. Michael Sasso routinely acted as his unit's interpreter and had the duty of warning civilians of imminent bombings. As soon as he started speaking Italian, he had no problems in convincing them to evacuate their towns because he "was their boy."³⁶³ Speaking a different dialect from that of the natives was not a barrier in the case of Mario Iafolla for winning the sympathy of Neapolitans, because the Abbruzzo dialect that he spoke was not entirely different.³⁶⁴ First Sgt. John Trigolo won the sympathy of the partisan Gino Sarti by "cheekily" speaking in Sicilian dialect with him.³⁶⁵ Italian civilian Piero Luigi Ceccherini, after heavily criticizing the Americans for their habit of stealing from Italian civilians could not avoid finding them "amiable," noticing that "some of them spoke southern Italian, while others spoke standard Italian because they were the sons of Italian immigrants."³⁶⁶ In short, as Pfc. Frank Barone explained, "with Italians: you speak the same language, you're like a *paisa*, you're like family."³⁶⁷ Robert Argentine, only in part capable of speaking Italian, forced himself to speak the language while in Italy in order to become fluent in it. The ability to speak Italian was, in practice,

³⁶² Furthermore, the Italian refugees were afraid of showering in the facilities provided by the American military (a required preventional measure against the spread of diseases). Sgt. Gallo was able to convince them only by showering himself with them. See *5,000 Miles from Home*, directed by Jim DiStasio and Mark McCutcheon.

³⁶³ Linda Grisolia, "He Did it For Love," War Stories, *Fra Noi*.

³⁶⁴ Mario Iafolla, interview by Nicholas Ciotola.

³⁶⁵ Gino Sarti, *Diary of Gino Sarti, 1943 – 1945*. Transcript (Pieve Santo Stefano, AR, Italy: Archivio Diaristico Nazionale), 99.

³⁶⁶ Piero Antonio Luigi Ceccherini, *Diary of Piero Antonio Luigi Ceccherini, 1922 – 1948*. Transcript (Pieve Santo Stefano, AR, Italy: Archivio Diaristico Nazionale), 278.

³⁶⁷ Joseph Frank Barone, interview by Peter Barone and Anna Raskin.

the greatest giveaway of an Italian-American ethnicity, and as soon as Italians found that out, they would always invite him for dinner.³⁶⁸

Sharing food, especially Italian traditional food together, another mark of Italian culture, remained one of the most frequent points of contact between Italian-American servicemen and Italians. Robert Argentine “hated” being invited for dinner by the Italians he met, conscious of their difficulty in sharing the little food they had for themselves. Despite being served food of poor wartime quality, he never complained, aware of the importance that food had in Italian culture.³⁶⁹ Pfc. Frank Barone was invited to dinner by an Italian child simply because he had found that they shared the same last name.³⁷⁰ Similarly to Robert Argentine, Sgt. Isadore Valenti never brought food at the homes of Italians when invited for dinner, although perfectly aware of their dire conditions, because it would have been perceived as insult towards their Italian sense of hospitality.³⁷¹

The awareness by Italian civilians of the presence of Italian-Americans among the masses of the American soldiers was enough for them to create a connection with all of them. In return, American soldiers sensed the centrality of sharing food for the maintenance of this connection with the local Italians, as their Italian-American comrades clearly understood. Doria Zanghì, a young Sicilian woman at the time of the Allied invasion, could not help thinking at how many, among the American soldiers in front of

³⁶⁸ Robert P. Argentine, interview by James M. Zanella.

³⁶⁹ Robert P. Argentine, interview by James M. Zanella.

³⁷⁰ Joseph Frank Barone, interview by Peter Barone and Anna Raskin.

³⁷¹ Isadore Valenti, *Combat Medic*, 37.

her, were sons of Italian immigrants, and was particularly moved by their gesture of distributing food to the population.³⁷²

Lastly, the Catholic religion as a characteristic element of Italian culture featured prominently in the stories of Italian-Americans in service in Italy during World War II. Americans, British, and Allied soldiers often attended religious services in Italian churches, despite their different Christian denominations.³⁷³ Some Italian-Americans, like Staff Sgt. (S/Sgt) Louis Libutti, however, were fervent Catholics, who became deeply involved in the religious activities of local Italian communities.³⁷⁴ Some Italian-American servicemen, like Sgt. Isadore Valenti, joined large groups of soldiers who participated in group audiences with the Pope after the liberation of Rome in mid-1944.³⁷⁵ Michael J. Annibale, born of southern Italian immigrants in Dunmore, Pennsylvania, served in Italy from late 1944 as a machine gunner in the 91st Infantry Division. In service in northern Italy, he and others were able to obtain a pass from their commanding officer to attend Mass and have an audience with Pius XII.³⁷⁶ During the visit to his Italian family in Altavilla Irpinia, Pfc. Albert DeFazio also went to visit the abbey and sanctuary of

³⁷² Doria Zanghì, *Diary of Doria Zanghì, 1922 – 1944*. Transcript (Pieve Santo Stefano, AR, Italy: Archivio Diaristico Nazionale), 7.

³⁷³ Cpl. Anthony Costanzo, Catholic, attended services in the local Italian churches during his service in Italy. See Anthony Costanzo, interview by the author and Steve Massa.

³⁷⁴ Tommaso Palermo, “Un Italo-Americano a Foggia: La Storia di Louis Libutti,” *Manganofoggia.it*, accessed July 3, 2016, <http://manganofoggia.it/un-italo-americano-foggia-la-storia-louis-libutti/>; Comitato Monumento 43, “Louis Libutti: Il Ritorno, I Ricordi, La Scomparsa” (video documentary), March 20, 2015, accessed July 3, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fo1fOOye4yE>.

³⁷⁵ Isadore Valenti, *Combat Medic*, 58.

³⁷⁶ Michael J. Annibale, interview by Harold Philips, June 5, 2005, Winchester, VA., video interview, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington D.C., accessed January 28, 2017, <http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.00948/sr0001001.stream>.

Montevergine, to see the painting of the Madonna his mother has told him about many times.³⁷⁷

Mario Avignone underwent something that can be defined as a true religious rebirth during his wartime service in Italy. T/Sgt. Avignone, from Chicago, Illinois, served in Italy with the Air Force's 304th Bomb Wing Headquarters Squadron based in Cerignola. He and some of his comrades often went to the local Capuchin Church, but the encounter that truly changed Mario Avignone's life happened with Padre Pio at the monastery of San Giovanni Rotondo.³⁷⁸ While attending Mass with Padre Pio (canonized by the Catholic Church in 2002), he described feelings of incredible emotion and joy, remaining almost hypnotized by him. The ceremony was followed by a dinner with Padre Pio, and visits to the abbey so frequent that Mario Avignone and his comrades became his "spiritual sons."³⁷⁹ During one of the following trips to the San Giovanni Rotondo, Avignone and his friends persuaded one of the monk to give him a piece of the bandages covering Padre Pio's stigmata, considered sacred relics. T/Sgt Mario Avignone's spiritual rebirth convinced him to attribute to Padre Pio's intercession the change in the military orders that would see himself sent to the Pacific theater after the cessation of the war in Europe, reasoning that the Saint probably "miraculously arranged it."³⁸⁰ Years after the war, he continued to venerate Padre Pio and his bandages, attributing to them the sudden healing from cancer of a friend who had touched them.³⁸¹

³⁷⁷ Albert DeFazio, Sr., interview by James M. Zanella.

³⁷⁸ *5,000 Miles from Home* directed by Jim DiStasio and Mark McCutcheon; Linda Grisolia, "My Spiritual Father," *Fra Noi*, Giugno 2007.

³⁷⁹ Linda Grisolia, "My Spiritual Father," *Fra Noi*.

³⁸⁰ Linda Grisolia, "My Spiritual Father," *Fra Noi*.

³⁸¹ *5,000 Miles from Home* directed by Jim DiStasio, and Mark McCutcheon.

These experiences show that the Catholic religious sentiment of Italian-American servicemen was in line with that of Italians and that they were able to find a connection with their land of origin also in terms of religion. Catholicism, which up until the mid-1920s, often caused suspicion in the American society, continued to be strongly felt by Italian-American servicemen and openly displayed in Italy. On an additional note, veterans' testimonies reveal that the trips taking entire groups of American soldiers to the Vatican State, to the abbey of San Giovanni Rotondo, and other holy places in Italy, were not enterprises of the individual soldiers, but were routinely organized and led by the U.S. military.³⁸² The U.S. military administration, aware of the large numbers of Catholic followers in its ranks, including large numbers of Italian-Americans, took steps to promote their acceptance and appease the Italian-American community at home.

The story of S/Sgt. Louis Libutti, from Brooklyn, New York, stands as the clearest example of the human bond that connected Italian-American servicemen at war in Italy and the Italian population, in particular in religious terms. Libutti, whose parents came from Avigliano, near Potenza, was based with the 99th Bomb Squadron, Air Forces, in Tortorella, in the vicinity of Foggia, Apulia in 1944. He was used at attending the functions at the local Catholic church, but soon he also started becoming deeply involved in religious and educational activities for Italian children and population run by the San Michele Charity. In a short time, he became a central figure in the organization, setting up English language classes, recreational activities for the young, free meals, and providing Christmas gifts for the children of Foggia with the contribution of the local

³⁸²*5,000 Miles from Home* directed by Jim DiStasio, and Mark McCutcheon; Linda Grisolia, "My Spiritual Father," *Fra Noi*; Isadore Valenti, *Combat Medic*, 58; Michael J. Annibale, interview by Harold Philips.

American soldiers. After setting the basis for the foundation of the local Boy-Scout organization, Louis Libutti started overseeing the activities of the charity in Rome and remained a dearly loved figure for the entire community in the postwar years.³⁸³

American servicemen in World War II in Italy, much like in the rest of Europe, extensively interacted with women. Differently from them all, however, Italian-Americans often related to them in ways that were peculiarly related to their ethnicity. In first place, some of them expressed conceptions of femininity that they referred specifically to the Italian woman and no others. Furthermore, the common national Italian identity tended to put these servicemen in a position that was psychologically and humanly closer to these Italian women than it was for all the other American soldiers. Additionally, with Italian women, Italian-Americans often appealed to the characteristic elements of Italian identity, in particular, the language and the sensibility for Italian customs and traditions. Many of these Italian women married Italian-American servicemen in the war years or immediately thereafter, receiving the title of “war brides” following them in the United States and giving start to a small, but extremely significant migratory event.³⁸⁴ The war bride phenomenon stands testimony to the existence of a link between Italian-Americans servicemen, the Italian people, and their military service in Italy.

Dante O. Martin, for example, of Buncombe County, North Carolina, and son of a family from Osais, Udine, met Ada Agreste in Monghidoro, Bologna in the winter of 1944. Among all the soldiers of his unit, he was particularly well regarded by Ada Agreste’s family and always took great care in providing them with food and goods. He

³⁸³ Tommaso Palermo, “Un Italo-Americano a Foggia,” *Comitato Mounumento* 43, “Louis Libutti.”

³⁸⁴ Linda Grisolia, “Operation War Bride!” *Fra Noi*, September 2010.

married Ada in 1946, and she followed him to the United States.³⁸⁵ Italian civilian Sandra Romanelli, of Milan, met Harry Colombo, a Pfc. in the 88th “Blue Devils” Infantry Division in 1945, in a Red Cross station in the northern city. Despite the fact that Colombo was reluctant to meet American soldiers about whom had “heard not good things,” she thought she could have something in common with Harry, because of his Italian origins.³⁸⁶ Always acting through an interpreter who translated Sandra’s letters in English, and Harry Colombo’s letters into Italian, they married in 1948 and she followed him to Illinois. In the case of Pfc. Nick Scardina, speaking the language was not a problem, and he approached Joanne (Giovanna) on the streets of Naples in Italian, soon being invited to meet her parents. Shortly after the war, she followed him to Ohio and the couple married in 1947.³⁸⁷

In some cases Italian sectional differences reemerged in the relationships between Italian-American servicemen and local Italian women, as in the case of Albert Onesti, coming from a northern Italian family, and Gabriella, of southern Italian origins.³⁸⁸ Despite the “big fuss” initially made by her family, they remained in touch for several years even if Albert Onesti did not speak Italian, after dancing together in a club in Florence, and Gabriella came to the United States in 1959. In general it was “common blood,” and not even necessarily only speaking a common language, that favored the connections between Italian-American servicemen and Italian women. Italian-American men were aware of this, and, sadly, as Daniel Petruzzi noticed, they often had their secret

³⁸⁵ Gilberto Tedeschi, “Nel 65° Della Liberazione di Monghidoro – 2 Ottobre 1944 – 2 Ottobre 2009 – Ai Caduti, e ai Veterani, della 5^a Armata Americana, dell’8^a Armata Inglese, ai Caduti Germanici... Coltivare la Memoria e non l’Odio...” *Gruppo Alpini “Luigi Campari” Monghidoro*, accessed January 15, 2016, <http://www.alpinimonghidoro.it/liberazione.html>.

³⁸⁶ Sandra Colombo, interview by the author and Michaelann G. Stanley.

³⁸⁷ Linda Grisolia, “Luck of the Draw,” *Fra Noi*.

³⁸⁸ Linda Grisolia, “Operation War Bride!” *Fra Noi*.

agendas: although sometimes they were seriously looking for a wife, in other cases they were merely looking for sex.³⁸⁹ Sgt. John Trigolo, for example, explained to Gino Sarti the value of cigarettes as currency in wartime to obtain, in particular, favors from Italian women.³⁹⁰ On the other hand, oftentimes Italian women engaged in relationships with American, often Italian-Americans as shown, servicemen out of feelings of real love and affection, in other instances it was only “gratitude, hunger, or dreams to go to America.”³⁹¹ Sam Edward Buemi, on a five-day leave from combat in Naples, met Tina, a local civilian, in the street and at the end of his brief stay, she proposed to dress him up as an Italian civilian, let him stay with her family, and not report back to duty.³⁹²

In opposition to a general feeling of attraction and connection by Italian-Americans towards Italian women, some servicemen expressed diffidence in their regards and invited the use of caution with them, all on account of their Italian identity. Sgt. Isadore Valenti, in particular, engaged in a detailed description of the Sicilian woman, according to him distinct from the Italian woman, as dangerously attractive, characterized by a shift from a natural God-fearing character, to one of strong sexuality aroused by the war. For this reason, he deemed her particularly dangerous for the American GI.³⁹³ As one of the Italian-American servicemen who did not find a war bride during his wartime

³⁸⁹ Daniel J. Petruzzi, *My War Against the Land of My Ancestors*, 121.

³⁹⁰ Gino Sarti, *Diary of Gino Sarti, 1943 – 1945*, 98-99.

³⁹¹ Daniel J. Petruzzi, *My War Against the Land of My Ancestors*, 121.

³⁹² Sam Edward Buemi, from Lyndhurst, Ohio, served in the 9th and 3rd Infantry Division in Africa, Sicily, and Italy. He reported back to duty after his five-days leave and went back to combat. Sam E. Buemi interview by Thomas Swope, August 26, 2003, Lyndhurst, OH, video interview, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington D.C., accessed January 28, 2017, <http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.07603/>.

³⁹³ Isadore Valenti, *Combat Medic*, 32.

service in Italy, Emilio DiFilippo commented that “I managed to stay away from them, or maybe they managed to stay away from me.”³⁹⁴

Italian identity and its forms of expression was, in many ways, central in the daily interactions of Italian-Americans with Italian citizens. In particular, some historians have highlighted the importance of Italian identity in the relationship between Italian-American agents of the OSS, of the CIC, and Liaison Officers operating in close contact with the Italian resistance. Historian Piero Boni, analyzing the interaction between the Americans and the Italian resistance, stated that,

...this relationship of mutual loyalty between the O.S.S. forces and the partisans was made possible also by another important element, namely the presence of Italo-American soldiers. As the majority of the partisans could not speak English, Italo-Americans – often at odds with standard Italian, but fluent in dialects that sounded very familiar – were able not only to make themselves understood but also to establish a warm relationship with partisan troops. This worked as an excellent prerequisite for the success of joint military actions. Because of their cultural background, Italo-Americans were in a better position to understand us; we, in turn, were facilitated in understanding them. Thus, communication was often both immediate and spontaneous; it was not hard for us to feel we definitely had something in common with them. They were able to get to know and understand the nature and the motives of our commitment.

Max Corvo attributed the positive outcome of the negotiations for the Italian armistice to the personal friendship and closeness that developed between Marshal Pietro Badoglio (head of the Italian military forces) and Lieutenant-Colonel John Ricca. This, in particular, proved possible not simply because of common Italian origins, but in particular because Lt. Col. John Ricca could converse with Badoglio in the dialect of the Piedmont region where both of them came from.³⁹⁵ Although OSS agent Aldo Icardo of the SI Italian Section could speak the local dialect of the city of Asti, in Piedmont, it was

³⁹⁴Emilio DiFilippo, interview by Nicholas Ciotola.

³⁹⁵ Max Corvo, *Max Corvo: OSS Italy 1942-1945*, 123-124.

not useful in the area surrounding the Lake Maggiore where he operated during “Operation Mangoosteen,” in late 1944.³⁹⁶ Consequently, he was forced to speak only Italian but was able to refine his speaking ability to such a degree that he was able to blend in the regular Italian crowd in Torino and other northern Italian cities, winning the trust of both Italian partisans, civilians, and enemy Italian soldiers.³⁹⁷ Finally, the U.S. military assigned the difficult task of convincing Italian partisans to turn their weapons to the Allies to Italian-American agents like “Al” Gallo and Daniel Petruzzi, who were able to speak the language with the Italian partisans, and therefore build a relationship of mutual trust,³⁹⁸

In all these cases, however, mutual friendship and trust between Italian-Americans and Italians rested upon the recognition of the former as fellow Italians, and not as American foreigners. In a prevailing number of cases, as demonstrated in the previous chapters, speaking the Italian language, abiding by Italian customs, or simply having Italian origins made Italian-Americans simply Italians in the eyes of the natives.

In a handful of instances characterized by high levels of tension, however, this was not the case, and Italian-American servicemen were not identified as fellow Italians but relegated to the position of American strangers. “Al” Gallo and Daniel Petruzzi, chosen for their Italian-speaking skills and the good relationships they could establish with the Italian resistance, ran the risk of being brutally assassinated by the Italian

³⁹⁶ Aldo Icardi, *American Master Spy: A True Story* (New York, NY: University Books, Inc., 1954), 210.

³⁹⁷ Pierino, one of the local contacts of the Italian resistance in northern Italy did not recognize the identity of Icardi, and was considerably surprised to find out he was an American, commenting, “I would never have guessed. You speak Italian so well. Why- you even look and act like an Italian.” See Aldo Icardi, *American Master Spy*, 125.

³⁹⁸ *5,000 Miles from Home* directed by Jim DiStasio and Mark McCutcheon; Linda Grisolia, “Undercover Officer,” *Fra Noi*, December 2008.

partisans after telling them that the American command had not agreed to their requests for more guns and money. “Al” Gallo and Daniel Petruzzi were also among the first to arrive in Loreto Square, Milan, and witness the macabre scene of the shot and beaten up corpses Benito Mussolini, his mistress Clara Petacci, and other members of the Fascist party, hanging from their feet from the structure of a gas station in front of an angry crowd. Once there, they immediately demanded in Italian the partisans to take the bodies down, but in exchange were sent away at gunpoint, because it was “none of their business,” almost as if they were foreigners enmeshing themselves in internal Italian issues.³⁹⁹

Italian identity, like any other identity, was a shifting concept in wartime, and Italian-Americans, divided between their Italian and American identities were sometimes recognized as fellow Italians, and sometimes as American foreigners. Albert Onesti told that American soldiers were not well seen by some young Italian men “because they thought they were taking their women away.”⁴⁰⁰ In fact, in Naples by himself, once he was almost confronted by a group of men until a young boy “out of nowhere” told the crowd to “leave him alone, he’s Italian...he’s one of us.”⁴⁰¹ Umberto Giuntoli, an Italian civilian, despite noticing the Italian origins of many American passing by in Tuscany, called them, simply, Americans.⁴⁰² Philip J. Passaro, U.S. Army, testified the feeling of many young Italian-American servicemen:

³⁹⁹ Daniel J. Petruzzi, *My War Against the Land of My Ancestors*, 308-309; *5,000 Miles from Home*; Linda Grisolia, “Undercover Officer,” *Fra Noi*.

⁴⁰⁰ Linda Grisolia, “Luck of the Draw,” *Fra Noi*.

⁴⁰¹ Linda Grisolia, “Luck of the Draw,” *Fra Noi*.

⁴⁰² Umberto Giuntoli, *Diary of Umberto Giuntoli, 1944*. Transcript (Pieve Santo Stefano, AR, Italy: Archivio Diaristico Nazionale), 19.

When we were growing up and it wasn't until the Second World War that most of these Americans of Italian descent, they didn't even realize they were Americans. They were so reminded they were Italians because they were harassed and criticized so much... When we got to Italy, the Italians were calling us Americans... The Americans looked at you [as] Italian and the Italians looked at you, even though you were Italian... as American.⁴⁰³

On the other hand, however, the possibility of Italian identity was a shifting concept also in the eyes of Italian-Americans in regards to the Italian natives, in a peculiar switch of roles, regardless of the fact that Italy was their land of birth. In particular, as previously seen, Domenic Melso did not consider the Italians during the Mussolini regime as "true" Italians, especially after their declaration of war against of the U.S. in 1941.⁴⁰⁴ Although Italian-Americans and the majority of the American population did not share Melso's consideration of all Italians, a line between "real" Italians and non-Italians continued to be drawn along the line of their support or opposition to Fascism. In their testimonies, Italian-Americans in Italy tended to carefully make a distinction between Italians and Fascists, which is indicative, however, of something more than a simple literary expedient.

For servicemen of Italian descent, their war in Italy continued to be a war focused exclusively against the Fascists. Especially at the beginning of his military service in Italy, Daniel Petruzzi was constantly divided between feeling sympathy or dislike towards Italians, but only because he did not know how many among them were actually Fascists.⁴⁰⁵ Despite the criminal behavior of some of the partisans he faced "Al" Gallo respected and considered them true Italians, because patriotic combatants for the ideals of

⁴⁰³ Melissa E. Marinaro, "La Generazione Più Grande," 43

⁴⁰⁴ See Chapter 3, INSERT PAGE#.

⁴⁰⁵ Daniel J. Petruzzi, *My War Against the Land of My Ancestors*, 87-107.

democracy and against Fascism.⁴⁰⁶ Michael Annibale emphasized the danger that servicemen underwent even when not at the front, because of the many Fascists hidden among the population. Yet, he was always careful in distinguishing the Fascists from the rest of the Italians and never identifying them as one, although “a lot of them were Mussolini sympathizers.”⁴⁰⁷

Arguably, visiting Italian families and relatives who had remained in Italy was the experience which, more than any other, indelibly marked the military service in the Italian campaign of many Italian-Americans.⁴⁰⁸ For Italian-American servicemen going to see uncles, aunts, cousins, and grandparents they had never met before, or had not seen for a long time, but always heard about, constituted a highly emotional experience of reconnection with their own Italian roots, sometimes starkly different from their American lives. Based in Foggia, southern Italy, Pvt. Michael Franz, from Astoria, New York, borrowed an army truck and drove to the isolated village of Vaglio Lucano, near Potenza, with a comrade to visit his mother’s sister and the rest of his family in September 1944. Franz’s own family had always kept in touch with their Italian relatives since it immigrated to the United States, and their happiness for seeing Michael, followed by celebrations by the entire town, resembled those reserved for a long-lost member of the family and fellow citizen. Franz, who could speak the characteristic dialect of the town, came back once again in 1945 to see his Italian family one last time before returning to the United States.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁶ *5,000 Miles from Home* directed by Jim DiStasio, and Mark McCutcheon.

⁴⁰⁷ Michael J. Annibale, interview by Harold Philips.

⁴⁰⁸ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 238.

⁴⁰⁹ Anna Lucia Avigliano, cousin of Michael Franz, was a child at that time. See Anna Lucia Avigliano, interview by the author, telephone interview, July 30, 2016, Cuggiono, Italy.



Figure 4. Pvt. Michael Franz visiting his family in Vaglio Lucano, Basilicata, in September 1944.⁴¹⁰

⁴¹⁰ Picture courtesy of Rosario Angelo Avigliano, 2017.

Historian Salvatore LaGumina also reports the powerful story of Salvatore DiMarco, Army Corporal who was able to hug again his mother, father, and sister, who had made the fateful decision to stay in Italy immediately before the war.⁴¹¹ While still in Sicily, Cpl. Anthony Costanzo obtained a three-day pass to go visit his paternal grandmother, who warmly welcomed him despite having never seen him, in Termini. His mother and other Italian locals grew particularly fond of him in part because of his ability to speak their same Italian, and he was able to go visit them again after the Normandy campaign while stationed in Sicily to serve with the military police. His grandmother, worried he might get killed in war, attempted to convince him to stay, hide in her Sicilian town, and not report back to duty.⁴¹²

Speaking the local dialect featured prominently also in the visit to his family by historian Richard Gambino's uncle Santo Rossolino, as well as in Max Corvo's memoirs, who defined visiting his Sicilian family "one of the most memorable events of my life."⁴¹³ The call of Sicilian relatives convinced also T/4 Frank Palilla, stationed in Gorizia, north-eastern Italy close to the border with Yugoslavia, to leave for thirty days and go visit his family there.⁴¹⁴ Going to see his Italian relatives in Villetta Barrea was undoubtedly important for Chief Storekeeper Mario Iafolla, who lived a true adventure to meet his Italian family. He and another Italian-American comrade travelled a long way along mountain tracks, with an Italian guide and a mule to carry food for their families, avoiding mined roads and bridges blown up by the retreating Germans. Ending in the

⁴¹¹Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 238.

⁴¹² Roland E. Kidder, *A Hometown Went to War*, 59; Anthony Costanzo, interview by the author and Steve Massa.

⁴¹³ Richard Gambino, *Blood of My Blood*, 287; Max Corvo, *Max Corvo: OSS Italy 1942-1945*, 80.

⁴¹⁴ Frank C. Palilla, interview by John Coates.

British Eighth Army area of advance, they stumbled upon Italian troops led by a British officer, who warned them of the presence of German soldiers still in the area. Although the two were able to visit the village of the Castel di Sangro, where the family of Mario Iafolla's friend still lived warmly welcomed them, German gunfire confirmed them the warning of the British officer. Not disheartened yet, they repeated the same trip two weeks later, and Mario Iafolla was finally able to hug his aunt and his uncle in Villetta Barrea. His grandfather, however, had just days before left to go to Rome and check on his granddaughter, whose husband had become a prisoner of war by the Germans after Italy's armistice. After the liberation of the city in June 1944, Mario Iafolla was able to go to meet him and other relatives.⁴¹⁵ Mario Iafolla's adventure points to testimonies the importance that the Italian connections represented for many of the Italian-American servicemen in Italy.⁴¹⁶

Not only did Italian-Americans try to reconnect to their roots by searching for their families, but sometimes Italians attempted the almost impossible of finding their parents among the hundreds of thousands of American servicemen, sometimes succeeding.⁴¹⁷ Pfc. Albert DeFazio was found by his mother's first cousin by asking around to the passing GIs if any of them from Pittsburgh. The joy of meeting him was followed by the emotional experience of travelling to the Campanian village of Altavilla Irpina and meeting the rest of the family. Over Italian traditional food, he was able to

⁴¹⁵Mario Iafolla, interview by Nicholas Ciotola

⁴¹⁶ Pfc. Scardina attempted a few times to locate the native village of his parents in the vicinity in Avellino, but without success. However, he later finally found his relatives and, being based in Caserta was able to go visit them several times. See Linda Grisolia, "Luck of the Draw," *Fra Noi*.

⁴¹⁷ Lido, an Italian civilian friend of Piero Antonio Luigi Ceccherini, was asking around to the American soldiers if any DelPrete was among them: "he had two American cousins in the United States, and you never know;" See Piero Antonio Luigi Ceccherini, *Diary of Piero Antonio Luigi Ceccherini, 1922 – 1948*, 278.

reunite with his mother's sister and brother, his own godfather who had returned to Italy after years in the United States, and his cousins, numerous "like flies."⁴¹⁸



Figure 5. Cpl. Salvatore DiMarco, 45th Infantry Division, hugging his family in Mezzojuso during Operation Husky, July-August 1943.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁸ Albert DeFazio, Sr., interview by James M. Zanella.



Figure 6. Cpl. Salvatore DiMarco, 45th Infantry Division, was able to meet his family in Mezzojuso, Sicily, during Operation Husky, July-August 1943⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁹ Ezio Costanzo, ed., *La Guerra in Sicilia, 1943: Storia Fotografica* (Le Nove Muse Editrice: Catania, Italy, 2009), 241.

⁴²⁰ Ezio Costanzo, ed., *La Guerra in Sicilia, 1943*, 241.

Significantly, the visits of Italian-American servicemen to their families still in Italy were not the result of lucky encounters, but authorized trips undertaken with leaves generally granted by their superior officers. This suggests a generalized understanding by the U.S. military, at least at the lower levels, of the particular situation of Italian-American military personnel serving in Italy and having Italian relatives and loved ones in the operational theater. In fact, Dominic Storino obtained a pass to go visit his aunt in San Fili, close to Naples, even though it was cut short by the MPs hastily recalling him to duty, in preparation for Operation Shingle in January 1944.⁴²¹ According to the testimony of Cpl. Michael Sasso, his visits to his wife's and his own families in Casteldaccia and Termini, which resulted in a great celebration, were authorized by the higher command with a four-day pass.⁴²² After his participation to Operation Avalanche in September 1943, 1st Lt. Joseph DeMasi had become the personal interpreter of Col. James M. Gavin, the commander of the 505th PIR. The colonel himself signed the authorization for DeMasi to go visit his family nearby in Airola. There he was able to enter in contact with the very poor rural reality of the life that his family was still living and promptly returned a day later with a truck loaded with provisions.⁴²³ Ignazio Bellafigliore, for his part, went AWOL (Absent With-Out Leave) for five days to visit his family in Sicily, but his captain "turned his head the other way," showing his understanding for his situation.⁴²⁴

Many Italian-Americans in service took advantage of the fact that they were in Italy to visit their families and their Italian relatives, living positive and emotional experiences that sharply contrasted with the brutal military campaigns in which they took

⁴²¹ Linda Grisolia, "An Italian in Italy" War Stories, *Fra Noi*.

⁴²² Linda Grisolia, "He Did it For Love," War Stories, *Fra Noi*.

⁴²³ Joseph V. DeMasi, interview by G. Kurt Piehler and Tara Liston.

⁴²⁴ Ignazio Bellafigliore, interview by Andrew Amari.

part. In this way, they reconnected with their origins and thereby reaffirmed a bond between Italian-Americans and Italians and ultimately between the United States and Italy which had never really weakened since the start of the Italian immigration overseas. Cornelius Granai, once in northern Italy, not only managed to go visit his family in Carrara but also acted to connect the Italian-American community of Barre, Vermont, with Novara, in Piedmont.⁴²⁵ 1st Lt. Daniel Petruzzi, in Naples, continued to receive in his office locals asking him to “assure their relatives in ‘Brookaleen.’”⁴²⁶

In some cases, Italy also became the theater of fortuitous reunions between Italian-American and close relatives simultaneously in service there with the U.S. Armed Forces, as in the case of two of the Adorno brothers.⁴²⁷ In these encounters, the happiness of Italian-American servicemen of reuniting with loved and close members of their families added to the overall experience of finding themselves in their land of origin and being able to share such experience with others. DiFilippo simply ran into his brother, who was riding on the back of a jeep in Naples and went with him to visit their Italian relatives in Sant’Angelo Fassionello, Salerno.⁴²⁸ Knowledgeable of the naval bureaucracy, Mario Iafolla recommended that his brother write a letter similar to the one he himself had written, and request a transfer to Italy because of his special abilities that would make him useful there for the Navy intelligence. Transferred to Palermo, Mario Iafolla’s brother was able to get on a flight that took him to Naples where he met up with Mario. From there, the two continued to Villetta Barrea and even Rome, to visit their Italian

⁴²⁵ Cornelius Granai, *Letters from “Somewhere...”* 57-58.

⁴²⁶ Daniel J. Petruzzi, *My War Against the Land of My Ancestors*, 106.

⁴²⁷ Anthony Adorno was killed in action in April 1945, and was never able to see his brothers again in the postwar reunion they had planned. See Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 83.

⁴²⁸ Emilio DiFilippo, interview by Nicholas Ciotola.

relatives.⁴²⁹ For Cpl. Fred Ruccio, from Montclair, New Jersey, his casual encounter with one of his girlfriend Lucy's cousins in Italy proved an emotionally powerful moment.⁴³⁰

Lastly, American servicemen, as well as the other Allied soldiers of the many nationalities who served in the Italian campaign between 1943 and 1945, despite the war had a chance to visit the Italian land, and in particular ancient cities and their historic monuments. The many pictures that American soldiers took of themselves standing in front of the Coliseum are photographic testimonies of the existence of a flourishing wartime tourism, to which Italian-Americans were not exempt. Daniel Petruzzi, more than anyone else, interpreted his distant Italian roots in the light of an historic, artistic, and quasi-romantic heritage.⁴³¹ Pfc. Albert DeFazio went through a tour of some southern cities, the high points of which were the visits to Caserta, its Royal Palace, and Pompeii, as well as witnessing the initial stages of the extraordinary eruption of the Vesuvio, Naples' volcano in 1944.⁴³² Frank Mancuso, transferred to a hospital in Pozzuoli to recuperate from a wound suffered in the Southern France campaign, made trips to the renowned locations of the Island of Capri and Sorrento.⁴³³ Returning to the grim reality of war after visiting Capri and its *Grotta Azzurra*, the beautiful sea cave of the island, Carlo Ginobile commented: "it was magnificent there."⁴³⁴ Sgt. Isadore Valenti took a complete tour of Rome not stopping at the Colosseum but including the Vatican City, Saint Paul's Basilica, the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, Castel Sant'Angelo, and the

⁴²⁹ Mario Iafolla, interview by Nicholas Ciotola.

⁴³⁰ Gary L. Mormino, ed., *The Impact of World War II on Italian-Americans*, 87.

⁴³¹ Daniel J. Petruzzi, *My War Against the Land of My Ancestors*, 18.

⁴³² Albert DeFazio, Sr., interview by James M. Zanella.

⁴³³ Mancuso Frank, interview by Tommy Lofton.

⁴³⁴ Carlo J. Ginobile, interview by Sandra Stewart Holyoak and Jeneann Robinson, 21.

Catacombs. Fascinated by the beauty of Italy's capital, he continued his tour with his local guide, Carmella.⁴³⁵

Oral testimonies are a source of information on Italian-American servicemen's experiences in the Italian campaign of incomparable value in respect to other sources, like diaries and, especially, letters. Italian-Americans at home were perfectly aware that American troops, and their sons with them, were conducting a bitter campaign in Italy. The details of the operations, however, were communicated to them mainly through the official means of mass communication like radio and the written press, and not the personal letters of their sons (or daughters). Conscious of the ruthless efficiency of war censorship of the American military, most Italian-American servicemen, like Carlo Ginobile and Daniel Petruzzi, avoided writing their families that they were in Italy, even if they were living positive or exceptional experiences such as passing through the cities where their parents were born, or if they had just met long-missed Italian relatives.⁴³⁶ The letters of those rare servicemen who did it did not make it through intelligence screening, to safeguard the secrecy of military operations.

For this reason, as noted by historian Salvatore LaGumina, the letters of the Italian-American servicemen focused, much like the ones of all the rest of their comrades-in-arms, on the generic discussion of weather and life back in the United States.⁴³⁷ For their part, Italian-Americans on the home front understood what a powerful morale-booster letters were, and flooded the mail channels with letters for their sons. Nonetheless, Italian-American servicemen, unable to fully tell their families their

⁴³⁵Isadore Valenti, *Combat Medic*, 58-59.

⁴³⁶ Carlo J. Ginobile, interview by Sandra Stewart Holyoak and Jeneann Robinson, 27; Daniel J. Petruzzi, *My War Against the Land of My Ancestors*, 119.

⁴³⁷ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 149.

experiences in Italy, ranging from the horror of battle, or the happiness of visiting Italy's ancient cities, forced them to undergo an emotional internalization of their service in their country of origin. The resulting lack of testimonies in the personal correspondence of Italian-Americans that related their non-ordinary experiences in Italy, possibly accounts for the lack of specific interest on the subject by historians.

In some exceptional cases, however, Italian-American servicemen were able to establish a channel of communication with their families in the United States, which, free of censorship, underscored the uniqueness of their service in Italy. 1st Lt. Daniel Petruzzi, for example, ended up in the pages of the American newspapers after a National Associated Press reporter covered a trial held by U.S. military authorities for the Italian population in which he served as the judge. The reporter, Dan DeLuce, an Italian-American himself, could not abstain from emphasizing Petruzzi's origins referring to him as the "friendly, olive-skinned grandson of Southern Italian immigrants," in relation to the Italian theater of war.⁴³⁸ Daniel Petruzzi's mother learned only in this way that he was in the Italian theater of war, acting as Civil Affairs officer but not far from the frontlines.⁴³⁹ Pfc. Frank Palilla, after his alleged participation in reconnaissance missions with Charles "Lucky" Luciano, also claims that he was celebrated as the "Hero from Brooklyn," in the local newspapers of New York City's neighborhood.⁴⁴⁰ Ignazio Bellafiore's father also learned that his son was fighting in Italy after seeing a picture that showed him in Italy in the local papers.⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁸ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 149.

⁴³⁹ Daniel J. Petruzzi, *My War Against the Land of My Ancestors*, 243-246.

⁴⁴⁰ Frank C. Palilla, interview by John Coates.

⁴⁴¹ Ignazio Bellafiore, interview by Andrew Amari.

In conclusion, although Italian-Americans were sent in Italy to fight a war, they were also greatly impacted by a greater variety of experiences when away from actual combat. Some of these experiences were shared with the rest of their American and Allied comrades of different ethnicities and nationalities fighting alongside them. However, as the testimonies of Italian-American servicemen suggest, they, separately from their comrades-in-arms, lived these experiences in ways that were often inevitably different, because of their Italian roots and identity. Additionally, some of these experiences, especially visiting relatives and families in Italy, remained peculiar to American servicemen of Italian descent. Not all of the events that Italian-American servicemen went through outside of combat in Italy remained impressed in their memories as positive moments of happiness, but many of them did. Taken all together, however, these non-combat moments contributed in making the war in Italy for Italian-Americans a varied and in some cases even bittersweet experience in which the atrocity of fighting stood in contrast with rediscovering their roots. For these reasons World War II, and in particular the Italian Campaign, represented for second generation and third generation Italian-Americans returning home such a pivotal experience that set off a new course in the history of Italian-Americans in the United States.

CHAPTER VI – CONCLUSION

The Italian campaign came to an end on May 2, 1945, when the German forces of *Generaloberst* Heinrich von Vietinghoff's Army Group C and the RSI forces surrendered. From its beginning, on July 10, 1943, to its conclusion approximately 750,000 Americans served in Italy, 23,501 were killed in action, and an additional 97,000 were wounded, with an unknown number of Italian-Americans among them.⁴⁴² With the war in northern Europe and in the Pacific continuing to rage, plans were made to transfer American troops in Italy to the other theaters, and only after the final surrender of Germany on May 7, soldiers with enough points within the demobilization system called Advanced Service Rating Score, started being discharged.⁴⁴³ Rifleman Bruno Ghiringhelli travelled with his 10th Mountain Division back to the United States in August 1945 after Japan's surrender, and there he was finally discharged.⁴⁴⁴ Some, though, like Cpl. Anthony Costanzo, remained in Italy to continue occupation and reconstruction duty until February 1947, when the official Peace Treaty between the Allies and the newly constituted Italian Republic was signed.⁴⁴⁵ Pfc. Harry Colombo, in service with the 88th Infantry Division remained in Italy even longer, until 1948, assigned to the Trieste United States Troops (TRUST), the force tasked of ensuring the order in the city on the border with Yugoslavia until 1954.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴² Rick Atkinson, *The Day of Battle: The War in Sicily and Italy, 1943-1944* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2007), 680.

⁴⁴³ Chester G. Starr, Louis G. Geiger, Bruce K. Myers, John R. Vosburgh, and Walter A. Hamilton, *Fifth Army History: Part IX – Race to the Alps* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1947), 135-137.

⁴⁴⁴ Bruno Ghiringhelli, interview by Dominic Rios.

⁴⁴⁵ Roland E. Kidder, *A Hometown Went to War*, 59.

⁴⁴⁶ Sandra Colombo, interview by the author.

Coming back to their cities and towns across the United States, these men and women of Italian descent brought back with them their memories of their service in Italy in World War II. In many cases, these servicemen continued to be deeply troubled by the effects of combat, like Sgt. Carlo Ginobile or T/4 Frank C. Palilla, some, even up to the time of their interviews.⁴⁴⁷ On an individual level, Italian-American servicemen saw their tour of duty in Italy, more than anything else, as a moment of coming of age.⁴⁴⁸ For Sgt. Al Gallo, his personal war experience made him appreciate the value of life, and Sgt. Carlo Ginobile felt that he had “from a little kid...grew up into a man.”⁴⁴⁹ Pfc. Albert DeFazio enjoyed his military service because it provided him with an education that could not be bought.⁴⁵⁰ As historian George Pozzetta reported, authorities at the time understood that the military service of the returning veterans had provided them with travel experiences, of “mingling with men from many parts of the United States,” and “other experiences,” that “widened their horizons...sometimes beyond...the comprehension of their old-country parents.”⁴⁵¹ In particular, some, like Chief Storekeeper Mario Iafolla, considered their service in Italy as special, precisely because of the experiences that they lived in connection to their Italian background.⁴⁵² It is doubtful that Mario Iafolla’s war experience, like that of the other Italian-Americans who

⁴⁴⁷ Carlo J. Ginobile, interview by Sandra Stewart Holyoak and Jeneann Robinson, 27; Frank C. Palilla, interview by John Coates; James Caminiti, interview by Kathleene Lang; Ignazio Bellafigliore, interview by Andrew Amari.

⁴⁴⁸ *5,000 Miles from Home* directed by Jim DiStasio and Mark McCutcheon.

⁴⁴⁹ Carlo J. Ginobile, interview by Sandra Stewart Holyoak and Jeneann Robinson, 30.

⁴⁵⁰ *5,000 Miles from Home* directed by Jim DiStasio and Mark McCutcheon; Albert DeFazio, Sr., interview by James M. Zanella..

⁴⁵¹ George E. Pozzetta, “My Children are My Jewels,” in *The Home Front War*, eds. Kenneth Paul O’Brien and Lynn Hudson Parsons, 70.

⁴⁵² Mario Iafolla, interview by Nicholas Ciotola.

served in Italy, would have taken the same characteristic notes, related to his heritage, had he served exclusively in the Pacific Theater or in northern Europe.

The experience of war had in some ways changed these Italian-American servicemen, and their return influenced the Italian-American communities they came back to.⁴⁵³ Some of them took advantage of the opportunity constituted by the GI Bill (formally known as Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944) to pursue an education that they had neglected before their service.⁴⁵⁴ 1st Lt. Joseph DeMasi, a wounded veteran, used his GI Bill rights to go to Law School at Rutgers University, something that would have been unthinkable in his childhood.⁴⁵⁵ Sgt. Isadore Valenti loved teaching, and not wanting to go back to the coal mine, the GI Bill gave him exactly that opportunity: after the war, he obtained a degree from Penn State University New Kensington, became a high school teacher, and wrote his memoirs.⁴⁵⁶ Although it did not help him to find a qualified job, Sgt. Domenic Melso went to refrigeration school in Newark, New Jersey, taking advantage of the GI Bill.⁴⁵⁷ Military service was the event that opened up the possibility of higher education for large numbers of Italian-Americans, encouraging their rise in the American politics and society of the postwar years.⁴⁵⁸ These men and women, acquiring education, often obtaining better jobs, fully integrated within American society, and coming home after having seen the world, started leaving their communities and moved to other parts of the country.⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵³ Stephen Puleo, *The Boston Italians*, 203.

⁴⁵⁴ Jerre Mangione, *La Storia*, 340.

⁴⁵⁵ Joseph V. DeMasi, interview by G. Kurt Piehler and Tara Liston.

⁴⁵⁶ Isadore Valenti, interview by James M. Zanella.

⁴⁵⁷ Domenic Melso, interview by Sandra Stewart Holyoak and Joseph Pante.

⁴⁵⁸ Richard Gambino, *Blood of My Blood*, 288-290.

⁴⁵⁹ Stephen Puleo, *The Boston Italians*, 226-227.

After taking part to Operation Avalanche, the 82nd Airborne Division was transferred to Northern Ireland, in preparation for Operation Overlord, Paratrooper Joseph DeMasi was “disappointed” in leaving Italy, for the fact that he met “his people” there.⁴⁶⁰ Military service in World War II proved to American society beyond any doubt, and never to be questioned again, the loyalty of its citizens of Italian descent.⁴⁶¹ The fact that American society recognized the enthusiasm demonstrated by young Italian-Americans at the front, and by civilians at the home-front instilled pride in them, as fully accepted Americans.⁴⁶² Military service in Italy in particular also served as an occasion for many of them to reconnect with their roots, helping them to “resolve the dilemmas of duality possessed by so many.”⁴⁶³ Second and third generation Italian-Americans, now that they had obtained their full acceptance as Americans, in most cases continued to intentionally put their Italian heritage (the use of Italian language in particular) aside, exactly when new immigrant minorities were finding themselves in the same position of Italian-Americans in the early twentieth century.⁴⁶⁴ Nonetheless, many American citizens of Italian descent remained conscious of their Italian roots, and the mass experience of the war in Italy effectively worked to remind them of their origins. Slowly, with the coming of the movement for ethnic pride in the last decades of the twentieth century, they continued to consider themselves Americans, but also became proud of their Italian heritage, giving start to the widespread adoption of the term Italian-American. As Petty

⁴⁶⁰ Joseph V. DeMasi, interview by G. Kurt Piehler and Tara Liston.

⁴⁶¹ Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Humble and the Heroic*, 204-208

⁴⁶² Stephen Puleo, *The Boston Italians*, 213-214; Linda Grisolia, “Luck of the Draw,” *Fra Noi*; *5,000 Miles from Home* directed by Jim DiStasio and Mark McCutcheon.

⁴⁶³ George E. Pozzetta, “My Children are My Jewels,” in *The Home Front War*, 70.

⁴⁶⁴ Nancy C. Carnevale, “No Italian Spoken for the Duration of the War,” 25.

Office Third Class William Grieco put it, “I’m proud to be an American. And I’m proud to be an Italian-American, believe me.”⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶⁵ William D. Grieco, interview by James M. Zanella.

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Dominic Rios Private Collection

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